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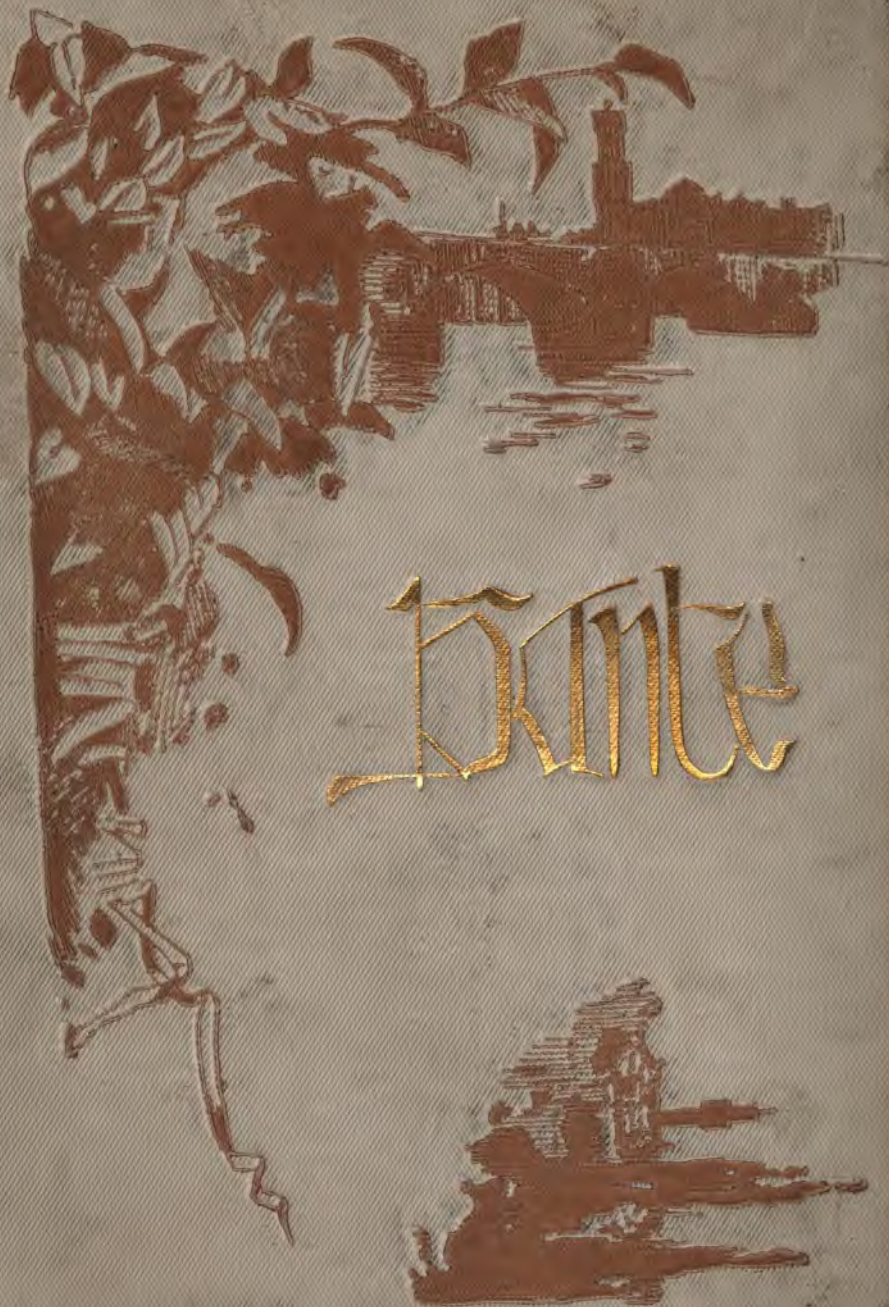
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# Drinks



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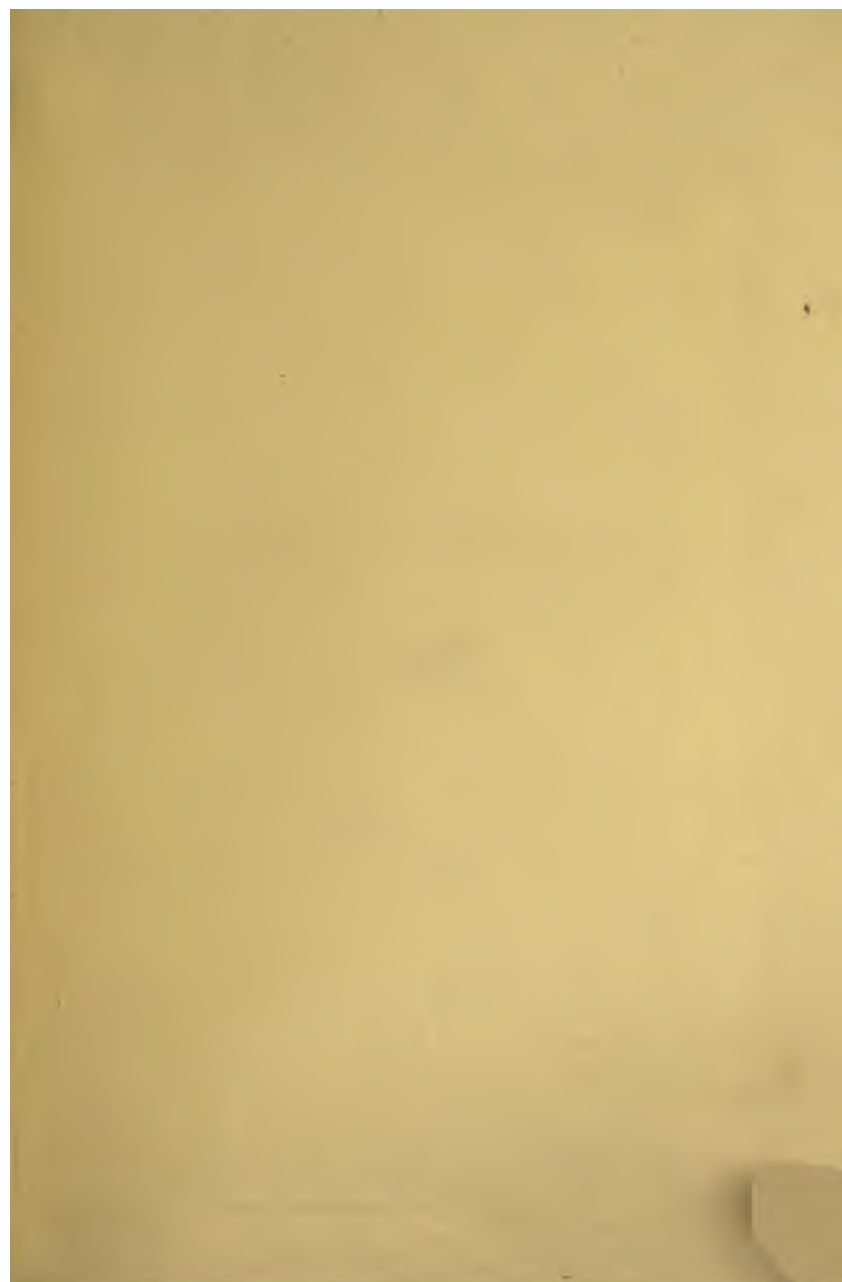
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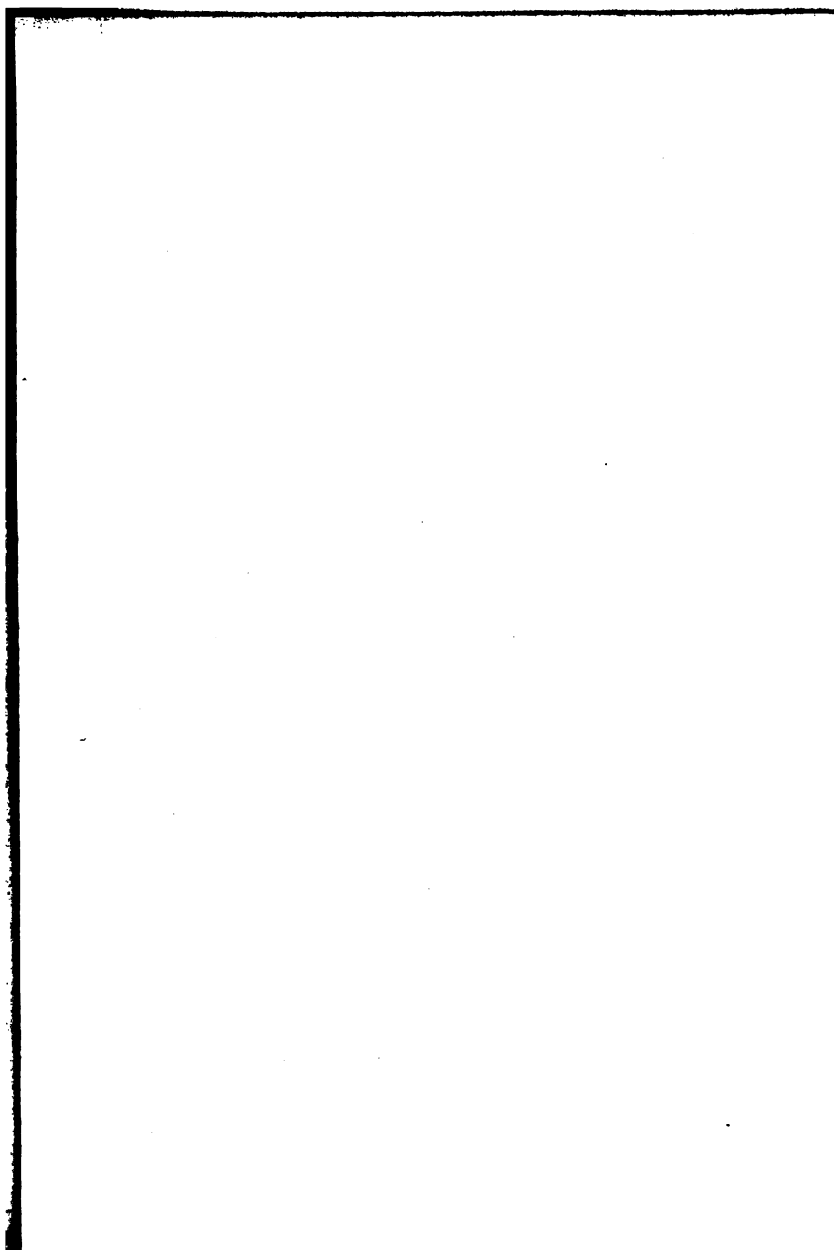
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DANTE  
A DRAMATIC POEM









Hélène Durand

*Photographed by J. J. J. J. J.*

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# DANTE

*A DRAMATIC POEM*

BY

HÉLOÏSE DURANT

MEMBER OF THE DANTE SOCIETY, CAMBRIDGE, MASS., U.S.A.

*SECOND EDITION*

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## P R E F A C E.

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IN Petzholdt's catalogue (1882) of Dantesque literature, there are over 750 volumes ; in Hoepli's (Milan, 1884) there are 1149 volumes. Translations of Dante's poetical and prose writings, commentaries and essays upon his life and works, have been published in Latin, Italian, English, German, French, Russian, Swedish, Danish, Polish, Spanish, Dutch, Hungarian, and Hebrew. It would be presumptuous to compete with the many scholars who devoted their deeper research to the study of Dante, or in one poem to draw a perfect picture of Italy's greatest poet.

Since the beginning of this century, Dantesque controversies have arisen. Documents hitherto consulted as authentic have been condemned as forgeries.

Dante's celebrated "Peace !" has proved anything but a peaceful subject of discussion. It is now doubted

whether the Friar ever existed to whom the remark was supposed to have been addressed, which rather precludes the possibility of any one answering him. And it is a mooted question if Beatrice of the "*Vita Nuova*" represents the fair Portinari or is merely a personification of philosophy ; while the petulant Gemma whom Boccaccio describes, is modified from a second Xantippe to a faithful wife not unreasonably troubled by her husband's moody abstractions. Longfellow himself held this opinion, and more than once said to me, "Vindicate Gemma !" His words, and the feeling that a tangible woman must have existed for Dante's heart as well as for his imagination, induced me to side with those who exonerate Gemma, and believe that the actual Beatrice Portinari inspired the "*Vita Nuova*." I am indebted to Professor Charles Eliot Norton's admirable translation for several lines in my prologue.

In 1881, while at Cambridge, Mass., Longfellow accepted the dedication of my poem and revised part of it ; but his death and the loss of his kindly interest in my work, made me lay it aside until this summer. It will always be a lasting source of regret to me that my poem was not completed before death silenced one of the sweetest of our singers.

---

I have tried to give an outline of Dante's life as drawn from his own words. But the rays shed by this great light of the fourteenth century touch us each so differently through the prism of years, that perhaps my vision of Dante may only meet with the sympathy of a few.

HÉLOÏSE DURANT.

*September 10th, 1888.*





TO  
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

---

As smallest urchin in the village school  
To say some trying task finds he must rise,  
Haunted by hopes of a far distant prize,  
Fearing to fail and so remain the fool,  
Knowing how rarely he has felt the rule,  
How oft the master's smile, with looks defies  
The scholars' taunts, seeking his teacher's eyes  
To gain new confidence should courage cool ;  
So I, the least on learning's noble list,  
In life's rough school face bravely gaze of crowd ;  
Nor mark when carping critics rudely twist  
My sense to naught, but stand erect and proud  
If from thine eyes and lips encouragement  
And smile I glean. Master ! I rest content.



## IN MEMORIAM.



WHEN faint my soul with task yet incomplete,  
Who nursed kind hope save thee—and urged to dare  
When I dared not? In thy now vacant chair  
Thou sat'st, mild critic, dropping counsel sweet  
On her who loved and listened at thy feet.  
To-day I tread rhyme's way alone, nor care  
For praise nor blame, since thou'lt no longer share  
With me my poem's triumph or defeat.  
Oh, let thy guidance still my safeguard prove !  
As giant oak wind-stricken to the ground  
To all the thronging tuneful choir around  
Yields royal shelter. So of thy generous love  
That blossoms freshly o'er thy hallowed grave,  
One tiny spray to nest my song I crave.

1886.

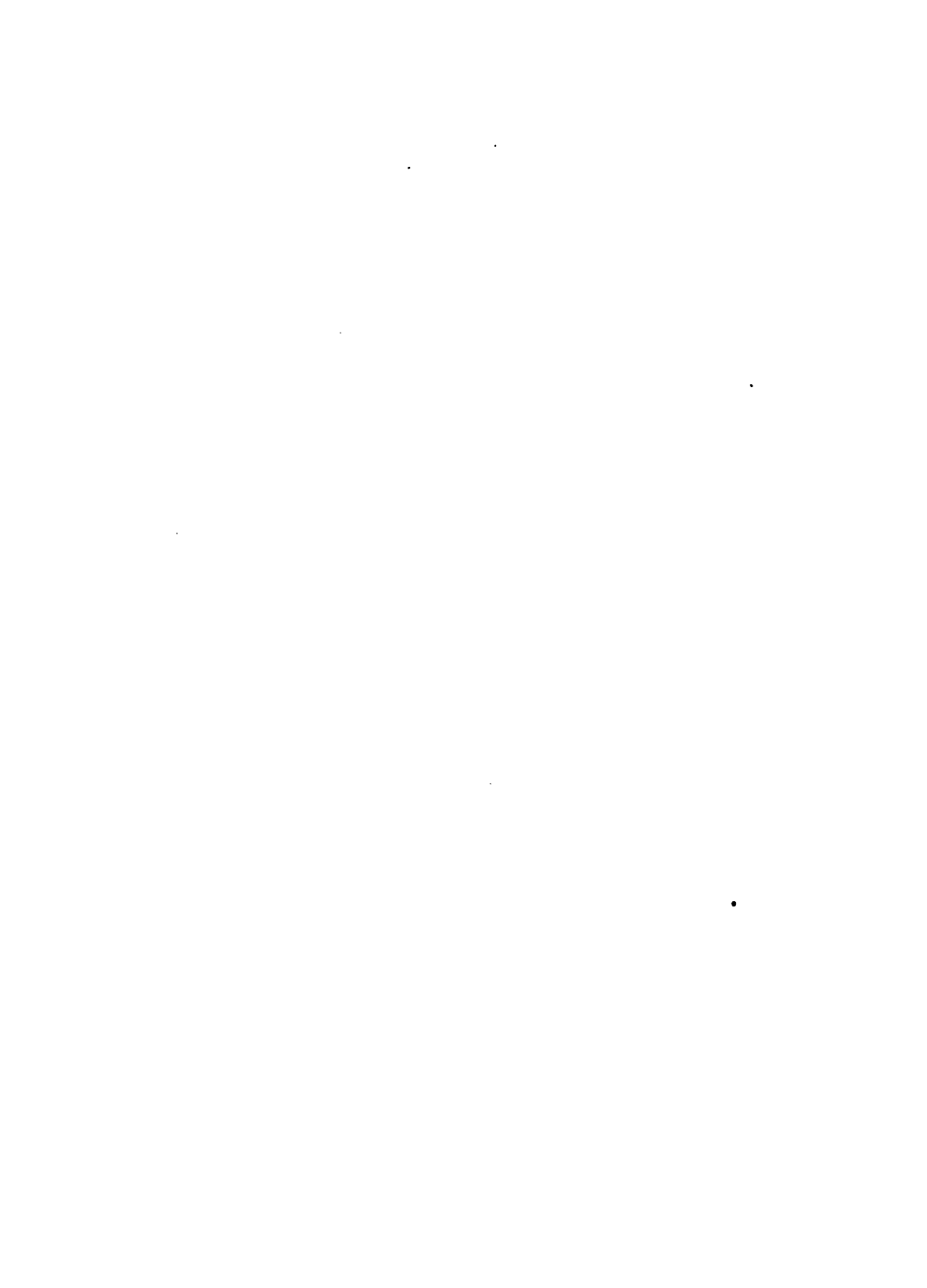


## P R O E M .

TO DANTE.



THOU mighty poet-king, with brows thrice crowned  
By genius, sorrow, love, who darest express  
Thy scathing thoughts aloud when bitterness  
Possessed thy soul ; whom Florence once disowned,  
Denied to sing or live ; who now sits throned  
In every heart through Italy, no less  
Revered than loved ; who spiest each dark recess  
And uncouth horror of the abyss profound.  
O look not thou reprovingly on me  
For stretching feeble wings towards eagle height,  
Wresting thy utterance, depicting thee  
With my poor pencil. Infants turn to light ;  
And so my weakness seeks thy strength to touch.  
Dante ! though frail my art, my love is much.



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.



DANTE ALLIGHIERI.  
GUIDO CAVALCANTI.  
MARCO NERLI.  
VINCENZO DAL COLLE.  
UBERTO DAL COLLE.  
CORSO DONATI.  
GIOTTO BONDONE.  
DINO BRUNINI.  
CAN GRANDE DELLA SCALA.  
GUIDO NOVELLO DA POLENTA.  
CARDINAL.  
JESTER.  
PRIEST.  
JACOPO ALLIGHIERI.  
PIETRO ALLIGHIERI.  
BEATRICE PORTINARI.  
FRANCESCA DAL COLLE.  
GEMMA (DEI DONATI) ALLIGHIERI.  
BEATRICE ALLIGHIERI.  
GIOVANNA (PRIMAVERA) CAVALCANTI.  
GITA.





# DANTE.



## PROLOGUE.

SCENE I.—*A garden near Florence, with view of city in the distance.*

*Enter BEATRICE PORTINARI. She crosses stage slowly, and leans over stone balustrade of terrace in full light.*

*Beat.* Florence, the sun caresses thee, as Jove  
Caressed fair Danae in a golden shower.  
Thy beauty glows, till eyes grow dazed with light,  
Like Queen thou art, so stately in thy strength,  
With silver Arnò for thy sceptre. Guard  
Thy rights, O royal city! Guard thy people.  
Still keep us gay with joyous feasts of love,  
With dance and song and gentle revellings,  
And let war's thunder roll beyond the hills,  
Forgotten in the nearer notes of peace.

*Enter FRANCESCA and GIOVANNA.*

*Franc. (stopping and calling).* Beatrice! Beatrice!

*Beat.* Pray spare my ears. Would I were deaf to-day!

*Franc.* So soon returned to earth? I saw thee caught  
In realm of fancy. Flown to such a height,  
Methought one pair of lungs weak messenger  
To call thee back.

*Beat. (seating herself).* Thou seest I'm close to earth.  
Come help me, friends; to-night my father feasts;  
We must weave wreaths to deck the tapestries.

*Giov. (gathering flowers).* I'll weave thee wreath to  
crown thee queen of love,  
Since Dante deems thee queen of human hearts.

*Franc. (gathering flowers).* And lion-tamer shouldst  
thou too be called,  
For thou hast sovereign sway o'er Dante's soul,  
And mid the learned is he not a lion?  
How fierce his flashing eyes at times—what scorn  
Sits on that lofty brow! But brown cheeks blanch  
At women's frowns—see his at thine.

*Beat.* He's slave  
Worth keeping in the chains of love, if 'twere  
But for his faithfulness.

*Giov.* Links forged by thee,  
Bice, the beautiful, are lightly worn.  
And e'en my duteous Guido swears by thee.

*Franc.* But here thy doleful lover comes. In faith,  
A mournful moving monument for mirth  
That buried lies beneath his close bound breast,  
While only ghosts of smiles peer from his eyes,  
Or play bo-peep around his dreamy lips.

*Enter DANTE and MARCO.*

*Marco.* We greet the graces in their native bowers.

*Franc.* Say seasons. Thou, rough Marco, be our winter.

And thou (*to GIOVANNA*) our spring,\* so Florence calls thee still,

While Bice stands our ever golden summer.

The changing autumn, I, my boughs part bare,

Part rich with fruit, while Dante be our poet

To rhyme our praises in his merry moods.

*Marco* (*seating himself by FRANCESCA*). Winter comes next to autumn.

*Franc.*

Turning e'er

Her coldest side to him.

*Dante.*

Thy father, lady,

To this cool spot lured us, by promises

Of thy fair presence. So I hasted here

In thy bright glance to bask, as snowdrops warm

To life from winter's chill, in smile of spring.

*Beat.* I weary of these forced comparisons.

As sun, moon, stars, by turn I shine ; conceits

By singer's fancy framed.

*Dante.*

Oh, Beatrice !

*Giov.* How stunned thou seem'st, grave Dante !

*Beat.*

Nay, he's vexed.

*Franc.* The irate lion feels his keeper's touch

On tawny mane, though light as thistledown.

\* "Vita Nuova."

*Dante.* A wanton woman's wit sees idle mirth  
In sacred things, and tries its wreaths of roses  
On sodden skulls.

*Beat.* Now out of gloomy moods  
We fain would laugh thee, Dante. Faith, thy brain  
Must feed on graveyard damp or midnight mists  
From salty marsh, so stern the mind that moulds  
Thy features to a lengthy face.

*Franc.* Say, short,  
'Tis like Eve's apple, ruddy, red, and round.

*Marco.* Thy apple savours more of fabled Paris  
Than Eden, more of discord than of knowledge.

[DANTE *retires up stage.*]

*Beat.* (*looking after DANTE*). Wasting his life in  
shadowy dreams of bliss.  
Our poet's braver fighting men than women.

*Franc.* He's learnt this truth: bodice and skirt with  
youth  
Are fatal foes to fortitude of man,  
And yet to fly a woman is disgrace.

*Marco.* In which I'll not partake, so still sit here,  
Braving the smiles I dread more heartily  
Than others' frowns; for wicked is thy wit,  
Piercing through closest coat of mail-like love.

*Franc.* O! love—love—love! the sacred cruse that oils  
The creaking wheels of this old lumbering world,  
How oft like fame 'tis wasted on the heads  
It seeks to crown. Here youth burns out, fresh heart  
On altar raised unto some seeming Goddess,  
Who when well warmed throws water on his flame,

And lightly scatters to the restless winds  
The ashes of his love. Here gentle maid  
Despoils her soul's sweet treasury, and finds  
Her purity and peace stamped out beneath  
The iron heel of some base libertine ;  
And men who could have left high honoured names  
As heirlooms to a future race, have spent  
Their talents, time, and strength, on some wild son  
Who grew to flout and hate his gray-haired sire.  
So love may prove a Will-o'-the-Wisp to those  
Seeking to catch his light o'er earth's vast marsh.

*Marco.* Gladly I'll seek and track the elf, and win  
Fair bride thereby.

*Franco.* Wilt have a wife ? I know  
A maid cut just thy pattern. A paragon !  
She's fair, they say, with eyes like shining stars.

*Marco.* Ay, and a painted piece of wax, a puppet !

*Franco.* Who talks and reasons well.

*Marco.* What, both ! From such  
Defend me, gentle Heaven ! Wives with their tongues  
Are bad, but wives with brain who chatter too——

*Franco.* This maid would rather read than be a gossip.

*Marco.* Far worse ! A modest wench should waste no  
thoughts

O'er love-scenes.

*Franco.* Nay, more oft she'd con her missals  
Than romaunt.

*Marco.* Sure, such saintliness would swoon  
If I did swear.

*Franco.* Not so, a maid of spirit.

*Marco.* A shrew, I'll warrant thee ; I'll none of her.  
Canst tell thy fancied fair to break her heart  
And rave that I her life have basely wrecked.

*Franc.* Wrecked, Marco ? Nay, thou knowest not our  
hearts.

What if we venture all our happiness  
Within the frail bark Love, and storms arise  
And toss the skiff on barren shore—what then ?  
Though love be stranded 'tis not lost. We'd glean  
The wreck-strewn beach, shaping a raft from out  
The fragments of our parted bark ; anon,  
Launch bravely forth upon the world's rough sea ;  
Our pilots, virtues sprung from stony griefs,  
Watered perchance with salutary tears ;  
For woman must be master of her love,  
Or it will master her. But, Marco, hark !  
This maid will hate thee not, tho' like white wax  
Near fire, thine image melts before her pride.

*Marco.* Was this a maid drawn by thy fantasy ?

*Franc.* I saw her thus reflected once.

*Marco.* Where ? How ?

*Franc.* Where ! how ! in thy two eyes, my friend. And  
she

Was but the mirrored image of myself.

[*Runs off, laughing.*

*Marco.* Cesca !

[*Goes up stage.*

*Beat.* Nay, stay, she brings our Dante back.

*Marco.* What meant she ? Not herself ; and yet her  
words——

*Beat.* Her's is an oracle best backward read.

*Marco.* She is a madcap, witch as well as sybil.

*Beat.* A loving friend with honest, purest soul,  
Whose wit tho' keen scarce wounds. Are prayers less  
true

When dropt from smiling lips? Her joyous heart  
In God's light basking, sunshine sheds on those  
Who lie forgotten in the shade by men.

*Marco.* Thy golden nature glints in singing hers.  
May I in my strong manhood prove such friend?

*Beat.* Be such to Dante—for he loves thee, Marco.  
His sad soul needs strong staff to lean upon,  
So be thou all to him when future trials  
Stamp out the few fresh joys and hopes of youth,  
And life grows stale and dim with dust of days.

*Marco.* Doth thy heart hold both kindly thoughts and  
mocks,  
To sigh o'er Dante yet to twit his love?

[DANTE approaches unseen by BEATRICE.]

*Beat.* If girlish vanity or love of taunts  
Beguile my spirit to unseemly jest,  
Anon I weep for it, tho' still unmoved  
My outward bearing may remain to him.

*Dante (aside).* O! Beatrice!

*Marco.* Pure as morning star  
Thou art, and fit to shine o'er Dante's path.  
(*Aside*) I see him nearing her as moth the light,  
Circling e'er nigher to its hope and doom.  
(*Aloud*) Where lingers Cesca—hast thou seen her, Dante?

*Beat.* Giovanna, come, we'll seek her.

*Dante.*

Lady, stay



And blend thy beauty with the flowers' breath.

*Marco.* Then we'll seek Cesca. Vera, come away.  
Rude winter heralding sweet spring's heyday. [*Exeunt.*]

*Beat.* I listen, but our poet's tones are mute.

*Dante.* \* When in thy presence, honoured one, I stand,  
\* My spirits faint till naught but sight is left,  
\* While e'en my daring orbs grow dazed and dim  
\* Beneath thy beauty. Speech deserteth me,  
\* My troubled heart wild beating stifles breath.  
My mind, too moved to think, for Tyrant Love,  
Whose liegeman true am I, claims every sense.  
O! thou who art my sight and pulse and thought,  
Be courteous with thy power, most gentle Bice,  
And sport not with the sorrows of my soul;  
Unless it pleases thee to see me wan  
With wretchedness.

*Beat.* Not so; with joyousness  
I would thy life were filled.

*Dante.* Each day men ask—  
"For whom has Love so wasted thee, O Dante?"  
And I could say, "For one who mockingly  
Commands me to be gay, while her cold heart  
Slays me outright with her own loveliness."

*Beat.* Forgive youth's wantonness.

*Dante.* Forgive me, sweet,  
That to such soul as thine I could impute  
A fault; no flaw could keenest eye spy out  
In thy pure heart; when women see thee pass

\* *Vide* "Vita Nuova."

\* They cry, "What miracle on earth is here? "

\* And men find evil thoughts killed by thy gaze.

*Beat.* If I believed thy words, to purge my pride  
'Twould *Paternosters* and more *Aves* need

Than one poor tongue could tell throughout the year.

*Dante.* To know one's worth can scarce be counted  
crime.

*Beat.* Yet to delight in self is deadliest sin,  
And pride thus fostered proves inimical  
To true philanthropy. O! shun it, Dante,  
Flee this cursèd sin. Pride, ambition, are  
The deadly twain, who slay all Christian love.  
Beware their subtle power; in thy strong soul  
Let no proud thoughts take root, lest they choke out  
With vilest overgrowth fresh-budding truths,  
And gentle virtue change to hardened vice.

*Dante.* As trusting babe clings close to mother's breast,  
With instinct truly seeking safest haven,  
So turns my heart to thy rare influence,  
Knowing thy virtue guards mine own. So speak,  
Most gentle lady. Would that I might listen  
To such sweet harmony till deafening death  
Dulls ears of clay—then find in Paradise  
Angels still syllabbling thy tender tones.

*Beat.* Trust not to human sympathy for strength  
To fight 'gainst sin. Since rebel Satan fell,  
The war 'twixt good and ill has fiercely raged.  
Why seek to vanquish hellish spirit-hosts

\* *Vide* "Vita Nuova."

With powers of earth? Trust only aid divine.  
Nor lean on some poor mortal prop like me,  
Who from thy sight may any day be ta'en.

*Dante.* Madonna, if thou fail'st me, life is death.

*Beat.* Should I be lingering, hearing One say "Come,"  
Hug mouldy garb of earth 'stead donning robe  
Bright with celestial woven tints?

*Dante.* If He  
Who lent such graciousness to us were pleased  
To call thee to Himself again—dare we  
Still stay thy steps, tho' in the jealous grave  
Slept all our joys with thy fair mortal form;  
But should thy presence fail me while in life  
Thou yet dost bless all human hearts and eyes,  
Then farewell, peace—unrest lords o'er my soul,  
Despair is crowned my sad heart's tyrant king.

*Beat.* Alas! through days to come we must not meet.

*Dante.* And wherefore, sweetest sovereign, dost thou  
send

This hated edict forth? What have I done  
As faithful subject to deserve such dole  
Of misery at thy hands? Thou dost not smile?  
O! Beatrice, is this jest or truth?

*Beat.* Truth—inasmuch as shortly I shall wed  
Simon de Bardi by my father's choice.

*Dante.* Thou wed a man no better than myself!  
Perfection thus with imperfection mate.  
My lovely lady live a common life  
Of wife and matronhood—when she was shrined  
Sole sovereign virginal in poet's heart!

*Beat.* True wife and mother in God's eyes become  
More sacred than most modest shrinking maid ;  
The ties of married love with offspring blest  
Can be the purest found o'er all the world.

*Dante.* If thou, O Beatrice ! will'st to wed,  
How canst thou give so lightly thy fair hand  
To one who cannot claim to know thy worth  
As I have done, since first as dainty child  
I saw and loved thee with thy short nine summers ?

*Beat.* My father honours Messer Bardi much.

*Dante.* And so his daughter honours him still more.  
Sweet lady of my soul, are all these years  
Of faithful love as naught to thee ? Can I  
Stand mute and see thee smile in stranger arms ?  
Heart of my heart, at this dread thought I die !

*[Flings himself down.]*

*Beat.* E'en tho' my father wished not that I wed,  
No lover's vow could I e'er plight with thee.  
I love thee, Dante, as our poet friend,  
Whose rhymes I joy to hear, whose heart I trust ;  
Whose soul, I ween, will climb heights still untouched ;  
Whose name shall ring through centuries to come ;  
Whose fame and virtues are as dear to me  
As if mine own ; but love thee not as wife  
Should love her lord. Withhold thy passionate love  
If it must cause thee pain, and seek elsewhere  
To house it in some heart that turns to thee.

*Dante.* Where could I nest my love, since in thy breast  
It shelter sought years past ? Could aught dislodge  
Such holy guest from such a holy rest ?

Nay, give thy sweet heart's dower to whom thou wilt,  
 So thou art joyous, need I weep my loss?  
 But let me keep my loyal love still pure  
 And live but in the pleasure of that love.

*Beat.* Alas! poor Dante.

*Dante.* Rich indeed in love,  
 Though beggared in all else. Let no salt drops  
 Deface thy roses—see, no more I sigh,  
 But smile—for in my soul thou still art mine,  
 And wilt be so for aye and aye and aye.

*Beat.* Dante! by all thy poet's fire I plead,  
 For thine own sake, to rouse thee from this dream.

*Dante.* Yea, dream, if life be sleep; but thro' closed lids  
 Love speeds at will. Turn not those emerald eyes  
 So sadly from me, for I'm merry, Bice.

*Beat.* O Dante! such strange joy springs from sad  
 heart!

Come to my father—come! [Going.]

*Dante.* O! lady sweet,  
 Mine still thou art, for aye and aye and aye!  
 [He follows her slowly.]

SCENE II.—*A street in Florence. MARCO NERLI and  
 DINO BRUNINI playing chess together at a bookseller's  
 door. Peasants, Citizens. A small group round an  
 Ass-driver selling milk, and a Charlatan selling salve.*

*Char.* Come, come, out with your jinglers; they are  
 as ready to leave their owners, I trow, as the last dregs

of a knave's conscience when he hesitates o'er some profitable murder. And this is to save life, 'stead taking it. Rub but the breadth of a fly's wing of this magic salve on broken bones, and they will be whole anon; grease but once a bald head or hispid pate, and lo! you have smooth flowing locks.

*1st Cit.* By the body of Bacchus, thou hast not tried it thyself then!

*2nd Cit.* In faith, the bear needs his own grease.

*Char.* "He who has a good steed in the stall is not ashamed to tramp afoot," says the proverb, and on the morrow, he who has sore head, sore eyes, sore body or limb, will beat his skull and cry, "Fool that I was to lose yestern my salvation!" Here it is, packed in a square of tree's skin. Come, Messer Lappo, Beppo, Guido, Donna Vanna, Nina, Cesca—come, rattle down some worthless coins, and get a prize. Doth thy wife keep the street awake with her clamours, Blackbeard? Here, oil her tongue with this, and I warrant thee her clatter will cease!

*2nd Cit.* It would be charity to distribute such salve throughout the town.

*Ass-driver.* As if any mother's son would try it!

*Char.* Well, thou sayest mother's son, for we are each of us that; but who can say we are our father's? So, young brown eyes, if thou wilt keep thy bride for thyself, rub this salve on her lips, and no man will know the flavour of her kisses but thyself. Out with the purses and in with the boxes. Fill every pouch with this miracle of the century.

*A Peas.* 'Tis good for the ear-ache?

*Char.* Ear, tooth, stomach, head, and heart-ache.

[*Sells some boxes. The crowd murmurs.*]

*1st Cit.* I must try the varlet's ware to test his words.

*Ass-driver.* And so fall sick from use of rankest fat.

*Char.* If thou wouldst be sure thy lover's vows are true, put speck of this salve beneath his eyelash, and till crack of doom he'll see none fair but thee—so stretch out white fingers, rosy cheeks—here's for you! (*Holds out a box to a girl.*) Old man, doth hearing fail? Rub some of this behind each ear, and thou'lt hear as at twenty. Doth memory weaken? Rub this salve on thy temples, and thy powers will strengthen again.

*Ass-driver.* Now, sure as the devil has a tail, thou must rub thine own ears each morn, else thou couldst ne'er recall thy long-winded jargon.

*Char.* It only needs a touch on thine to make thee counterpart to the beasts thou drivest.

*Ass-driver.* Dost want both ears and nose pulled, thou short-shanked, knock-kneed knave?

*Char.* Better be short and seasoned than long and witless, as the Latin poets say.

*Ass-driver* (*snapping his fingers*). Body o' Bacchus! they never wrote words for thy mouth. Our poet Dante says "that short men are nearest earth—earthy; long men rise towards heaven—heavenly."

[DANTE, *crossing stage, stops.*]

*Dante* (*seizing Ass-driver*). Wouldst bastard thy vile thoughts by fathering them

On me? Take that, and that, and that, thou varlet!

[*Beats him with Ass-driver's stick.*

Out of my sight—out of my hearing, wretch! \*

[*Ass-driver limps off mid laughter of the crowd.*

*They surround Charlatan again. DANTE  
crosses stage.*

*Dante.* There limps the rogue, with curses on his  
tongue,

Bearing of bumps and bruises his just due.

A se'en-night since, passing a smithery,

I heard, mid bellows' roar and anvils' blows,

Some snatches of my song sung all amiss.

\*Straight in the street flung I the smith's best tools,

To teach the knave to chirp my verse aright.

There should be tortures tried on those who soil

Fair poesy's pure robe by lawless touch.

Ape's hairy paw can with rude grasp deface

A Giotto's masterpiece; an idiot can

With sinewy strength swing high in crazy mirth

A ponderous hammer round a Psyche's head,

And shatter with one blow a faultless gem

Of Grecian sculptured art, and cry "Ha! ha!

These things are only made; I can unmake!"

A cur can snap in twain a sweet lute's strings,

And mute for ever are its dulcet tones—

Ape, idiot, cur—each type unites in men

Who with rude hands spoil pictured images

Of poet's mind, break up his moulded thought,

\* Sacchetti.



To discord change the music of his brain,  
And, laughing, mar that which they cannot make.

[DANTE stands absorbed in thought.

*Dino (at chess-board).* Methinks that Dante's humour  
grows apace ;

He lets those who offend him feel his hand  
As well as tongue. 'Tis thy move next—checkmate !

[A boy nails MARCO's cloak to his bench.

*Marco.* Not so ! here stands my queen—beware thyself  
Lest castle go. Ay, Dante's most forlorn  
Since Folco Fortinari's taken sick.

*Dino.* To death ?

*Marco.* So saith the leech, and on the list  
Of this day's dead methinks his name is writ.

*Dante (joining them).* While you sit dallying o'er a  
painted plank,

And play with carven figures skilful games,  
A brave heart makes its final move and stops,  
Checkmated by keen Death on this world's board.

*Marco.* Good Folco dead ?—well, may he rest in  
peace !

*Dino.* That's more than I can let thy king—check-  
mate !

*Enter GIOVANNA and FRANCESCA.*

*Franc.* Is this our Dante with so humbled mien ?

*Dante.* Ye see but salty drops wrung from dry lids—  
Surprised by passion's storm to outward show.  
Ye cannot see the silent lightnings swift  
Scorching my soul-rent heavens through, nor hear

The sullen thunder roar from my heart's peaks.  
But, ladies, stay and give me word of Bice.

*Giov.* She moans as if her soul would sigh itself  
Away through ashen lips, since Folco died.

[*They cross stage to the chess-players.*

*Dante.* Why am I reft of power to see my lady,  
Kneel at her feet, kiss tears off silken lash,  
As Phœbus kisses dew from grass at dawn ;  
With love soothe grief, and heal her gentle heart ?  
Blest is the lowliest wench that waits on her,  
Touching the hem of her sweet robe in service !  
I can but stand aloof, sigh, sing, and love. [*Exit.*

*Franc.* A tender heart hast thou—a flint, methinks,  
Cased round by some few veins of icy blood—  
To sit and wanton time when half the fair  
In Florence drown their lustrous eyes in tears !

*Marco* (*trying in vain to rise*). If but the lustre of thine  
eyes were dimmed

By any tears, 'twould grieve me to the heart.

*Franc.* Yet there thou sitt'st. Where are thy manners,  
man ?

*Marco.* In vain I try to rise. By San Giovanni !

*Franc.* I prithee swear not. Tho' thy tongue rapped  
out,

In good round oaths, the name of every saint,  
Thy sophistry would not convert my logic.

*Marco.* Cesca !

[*Springs up, leaving torn cloak, and overturns  
chess-board.*

See how my cloak was caught ! A nail—

A sinning nail kept my knees laggard. Now  
Thou dost not think I would not rise to thee?

*Franc.* I think—— What matters what I think?  
Good day!

*Marco.* Ay, but the nail——

*Franc.* Ay, butt it—butt it—butt it! [*Exeunt.*]

*Marco.* Thou cursèd spike, to spoil both cloak and  
temper!

*Dino.* And game. Who played this churlish prank?

*Marco.* Ay, who?

[*Looking at youths near him.*]

Knowing, his inch of iron I would pay  
By promptly putting through his hide some steel.

*1st Lad.* 'Twas he who nailed thy cloak to bench.

*2nd Lad.* Thou liest!

'Tis all a Guelph can do. [*Strikes him.*]

*1st Lad.* A little more,

Perhaps, thou piggish Ghibelline! [*They fight.*]

*A Cit.* A Guelph!

*A Peas.* A Ghibelline! and here's for thee!

*A Cit.* And thee!

*Several voices.* Down with the Guelphs—Ghibellines!

No—Guelphs—Guelphs!

[*The quarrel becomes general. Crowd retires up stage.*]

*Dino.* Thus dwell the peaceful race of Florentines,  
And swords and knives prick answers to hot words.

*Marco.* Ay, factious times, and growing worse. These  
brawls

But prove the smouldering fires beneath. 'Twere best

If we could stand one party in these walls.

*Dino.* That cannot be.

*Marco.* And why not? Since thou, Dino,  
And I, on adverse sides agree not ill.

Would all thy kinsmen felt as we do there!

*Dino.* Kinswomen, thou wouldst say. Our Cesca's  
Guelph.

*Marco.* And my house Ghibelline.

*Dino.* Come, drink to one  
Grand final union of both names in thee.

[*Exeunt.*

*The crowd.* Fair play, ye scurvy Guelphs!

Fair play! ye foul  
Unwashed Ghibellines!

Out on ye there!

*A Cit.* Smite him through crown to sole, thou doting  
fool!

*Another Cit.* Who calls us liars now?

*A Peas.* He's hit—he's hit!

*A Cit.* 'Tis one more grasshopper down in the dust.

*The crowd.* Way — way — make way — Guelphs —  
Guelphs!

No—Ghibelline!

[*Two or three carry out a body. More follow.*

*The rest continue fighting.*

## SCENE III.—DAL COLLE'S house.

*Dal Col.* So, wench, thou hast been dreaming of love-knots  
And turtle doves.

*Franc.* I, father? Nay, my dreams  
Bring me bright sword, steel helm, and neighing steed.  
My thoughts dwell rather on the lance than needle.

*Dal Col.* Tut, girl! 'tis hound or dog, 'tis colt or foal—  
Both featured counterparts, though thou call each  
By different names; so love-knots and steel helms  
Can both breathe love to maids. Now, have thine ears  
Not drunk in many passioned words of late?

*Franc.* Ay, when thy broth's too hot, or cake's too cold.

*Dal Col.* (*taking her hand*). Shut thy pert lips, thou froward minx.

*Franc.* A kiss  
Will close them fast.

*Dal Col.* Thou shouldst be saving such  
For gracious wooer.

*Franc.* When he comes, I will.

*Dal Col.* He came and went.

*Franc.* Without a chance for me  
To courtesy low and say, "I thank thee, nay."

*Dal Col.* Why nay, if he pleased thee?

*Franc.* He'd please me not.

*Dal Col.* How canst thou tell unless thou sawest the man?

*Franc.* I have a nay for full a score of men.  
This one would be too fat, and that too lean,  
And this too short, and that too tall, too old,  
Too young, too grave, too gay. I'd pick a fault  
In Cupid's self if he came wooing me.

*Dal Col.* So wilt thou dwell as virgin e'en to eld  
And wither on a single stalk, 'stead knowing  
The fruited boughs of matronhood? O fie!

*Franc.* Shew me perfection and I'll mate with it.

*Dal Col.* Then on my knee no child of thine I'll  
dangle,

As Marco fails to pose for perfect man.  
When he sought thee this morn, I scorned his suit.

*Franc.* Marco was seeking me?

*Dal Col.* Vowed he would prove  
A son to me, swore his undying love  
For thee.

*Franc.* And went he then without a yea?

*Dal Col.* Did'st thou not say a nay would be thy  
answer?

*Franc.* Never to him—the bravest, kindest man.  
His love would crown with joy a woman's life.  
O! that he stood but here—I'd to him straight,  
And throw mine arms about his neck, as now  
I twine them round thine own, and whisper low,  
"Marco, I love thee—take me to thine heart!"

*Dal Col.* Then try it, child; for knowing woman's mind  
Changes as quickly as an April day,  
I bade this valiant wooer turn his steps  
This way again ere sun be set, to learn



His answer from thine own two wilful lips.

*Franc.* The reddening west makes me a fool if here  
He find me.

*Dal Col.* Whither goest?

*Franc.* To my chamber,  
To ponder o'er the fitness of this wooing. [Exit.

*Dal Col.* She'll find herself a bride e'er second yea  
Be said. In Marco's eyes shone speedy wedding.  
And he's a man worth winning to our side.  
Though Ghibelline of somewhat peaceful stock,  
His widowed mother boasts good gold-filled bags.  
We need them all to help our cause. Marco  
Must be with us at length, or else—he falls,  
As every cur must fall who barks against  
Our might and right.

*Enter CORSO DONATI.*

*Corso.* What now, Dal Colle? Say,  
What trouble brooding in the air o'erclouds  
Thy brow?

*Dal Col.* No present woe, to-morrow's ills  
May be. What brings our lion from his lair?  
So silently and suddenly thou'rt here,  
I feel as thou wert answer to my thoughts!

*Corso.* Then was our cause thy theme. Now must we  
act.  
'Tis time to rouse us; every man we need;  
But arms and horses spring not from the ground,  
And gold must buy what force cannot command,  
So gold we must secure.

*Dal Col.* I have a child  
Whose hand to-day is sought by one through whom  
We can at last touch gold.

*Corso.* Urge on the match.  
Time counts with us ; we are beset with foes  
That crop up round us like rain-nourished weeds.  
Hew down a score, and hundreds fill their place.  
Among our very friends are traitors, too—  
That charlatan of singers, Cavalcanti,  
And Dante——

*Dal Col.* Prithee, spare our poet—peace !

*Corso.* His pride may cost him dear ere all be done.  
He deems himself of finer clay than we  
His betters are. His words are knives which cut  
Men's hearts to core.

*Dal Col.* Doubt not his loyalty.  
Dreamer he is, and proud with poet's pride,  
But frank withal.

*Corso.* Beware him, friend, beware !

*Dal Col.* He is but vinegar unto thine oil.  
We'll treat the subject further in my room. [*Exeunt.*]

*Enter FRANCESCA and GIOVANNA.*

*Giov.* I will not linger near thee now to mark  
The treacherous blushes telling of thy love.

*Franc.* Hush—hush ! I have no love.

*Giov.* No love—in Cesca ?

*Franc.* Be still, thou pretty teller of untruths.

*Giov.* Untruths that Guido with me tested well.

*Franc.* Wouldst have me credit that I lived on love,



As travellers say chameleons live on air?  
I'd choose a more substantial fare and bed.  
Wilt preach a sermon on Love's devotees,  
Take Dante for thy text.

*Giov.* How fares our poet?

*Franc.* He moodier grows since Beatrice's wed.  
When Portinari died how great his grief,  
The public loss forgotten in the friend ; \*  
And in sweet Bice's sunshine Dante lives.  
Obscure that orb and dark his heavens henceforth.

*Giov.* I must be leaving thee ; for should one come  
And find me claiming thy sweet eyes and ears,  
No longer "Spring" I'd be—my very presence  
Would wear a wintry air.

*Franc.* Nay, stay.

*Giov.* Farewell !

To-morrow I will greet thee—Marco's bride. [Exit.

*Franc.* Yet "nay" is quickly said, and "yea," methinks,  
More quickly still. Fond fool, to fancy maids  
Are won so lightly. What power hath love, that I,  
E'en I, Francesca, should be willing, ay,  
And gladly so, to yield my virgin pride  
Unto a stranger's keeping ! Yet I'd box  
His saucy ears if he but whisper this.  
And still I love him. Come, my Marco, come !

*Enter MARCO.*

*Marco.* Fair lady, am I welcome ?

*Franc.* Truly not,

\* He built Santa Maria, first hospital in Florence.

Unless thou bring'st good news.

*Marco.* I bring myself.

*Franc.* That thou art news I never knew before ;  
That thou art good I ne'er shall ascertain.

*Marco.* But not for lack of opportunity.  
I'll give thee years to test me in.

*Franc. (with courtesy).* Great thanks ;  
The test is not much to my taste.

*Marco.* But 'tis  
To mine, and for the future we may share  
Possessions.

*Franc.* *May* is not ill said. Your *may*  
Can wait upon my *shall*, till both are worn  
To a leg between them with the standing,  
And still my *shall* remains unchanged. Your *may*  
Had better go to the wall.

*Marco.* Not so thinks  
Thy father.

*Franc.* Marco ! I am not my father,  
The saints be praised ! Wouldst have me think his  
thoughts ?

Then must I grow his beard, thin, grey my locks,  
And wrinkle up my brows, and harden palms,  
Donning a garb like thine for woman's folds.  
Speak, Marco—would I please thee better so ?

*Marco.* Nay, thou art best as maid with all thy faults.

*Franc.* Have I then faults ? And dost thou con them  
o'er

With drivelling zeal as crooning dame her beads ?

*Marco.* Come, Cesca, in a war of words I'm naught.

A truce to skirmishing with wit ; list first  
To honest truths. I'm here to know thy mind.  
Lay thy small hand in mine, and say, "Marco,  
I love thee," and the wide, wide world henceforth  
Could crumble all to dust ere I prove false.

*Franc.* Wouldst wed a puppet—painted piece of wax—  
A maiden who might talk a man to death,  
Or waste her time o'er love scenes, or a shrew,  
Or silly saint who'd swoon if thou but swore,  
A good-for-naught who was to break her heart  
For love of thee ?

*Marco.* What means this speech ?

*Franc.* Good sir,  
Thy memory's dull ; these words should call to mind  
Fair flowers, bright eyes, stone bench, Bice, thyself.  
I heard this from thy lips one summer eve  
When offering thee a wife.

*Marco.* Ah ! pretty witch,  
I see thy wicked meaning—for this crime  
Shall claim sweet recompense. [*Taking her hand.*

*Franc.* Nay, tarry yet.  
Women are vanes, men say—what wind will blow  
Me round to face thy love ?

*Marco.* My heart's, sweet maid.

*Franc.* But it may prove false prophet. [*Going.*

*Marco.* And wherefore ?  
Has, then, thy father tricked me here to jest  
At honest love ? No answer ! Fare thee well.  
Time shall soon show I am no beardless boy,  
And brook no insult calmly. [*Going.*

*Franc.* Marco, stay !  
My father likes thy suit, speaks well of thee ;  
But I——

*Marco.* Would fain be rid of it. Nay, Cesca,  
I'd force no maid to wed against her will.

*Franc.* Nay, nay ; not quite against my will.

*Marco.* But not  
With all thy maiden heart. I know thee true,  
And would not gain thy hand without thy love.  
Again, farewell ! [Going.

*Franc.* But stay ; a little love——

*Marco.* A little ? All thou hast to give, or none !  
For stinted measures suit my meaning not.  
So come, out with it ; speak thee yea, or nay !

*Franc.* A weakling yea. A dwarf—a pigmy yea.

*Marco.* A stout, strong yea ; a giant—Hercules.  
And say thou lovest me.

*Franc.* How needless that !

*Marco.* I will not have thy yea without those words,  
And with no yea from thee, thou hast not me.

*Franc.* Then, Marco—fie, fie ! wouldst thou force me  
say it ?

*Marco.* Alas ! then must we part ! Farewell——

*Franc.* But wait.  
Give me the time to say those fateful words  
Which bind me thine. Marco—yea—I love thee !

SCENE IV.—*Room in DANTE'S house.**Enter DANTE and GUIDO CAVALCANTI.*

*Guido.* Ere half life's thread be spun, man meets  
                  mishaps

To tussle with. Though tearing teeth of Time  
Gnaw viciously his strength, he conquers both  
Mishaps and Time if (in this *if* lies all)  
His valor be as Mars', his patience Job's.  
Else sinks he 'neath them, as the traveller sinks  
Beneath the blinding snow on Switzer heights,  
Lying a clod benumbed, a senseless weight,  
When fatal slumber slips unmarked to death.  
As thou hast played till now the conqueror's part  
Through bloodiest frays, now bravely face Love's war,  
Nor flinch not if a mastery to gain  
He shroud fair limbs from sight in dull, cold earth.

*Dante.* Prate not to me of love ; prate not of war.  
I have no heart even to think what woe  
May yet be mine.

*Guido.* Not if o'ermastered by  
Thy stronger self. My Vera's dear to me ;  
But should God take her hence, I trust my soul  
Would bear the burden sent ; and so canst thou.

*Dante.* This boasted strength of mine once failed me  
                  sadly.  
Some haply find their courage born full-grown,  
Like Pallas from Jove's front, to suit the hour,

While others find their bravery but babe  
When chance may give it birth ; so found I mine.  
It sorry suckling proved when mid the strife  
I first drew blade and fought at Campaldino.\*  
Like birds men stricken fell 'neath archer's aim ;  
Rotella and Parvesa shields were pierced  
By trusty lance, smooth swords smote skull-caps through ;  
While foremost in the ranks rode Feditori,  
With cry of " Cavalieri !" or " Narbonne !"  
When wild came answer back from Aretines  
And Ghibellines, the cry of " San Donato !"  
Then grew my courage at a breath—a man—  
And fast coursed heated blood through swollen veins.  
We met our foes as wave would break on wave,  
Our blows and bodies mixed in bloody whole.  
Fierce raged the fight, dense dust dimmed light of day,  
Till sun was but a red blot in the sky,  
And through the murky gloom crawled serpent-like  
False Ghibellines, to reach us unawares  
Beneath Palfreni and Ronzoni, where  
They wound themselves, and with long knives ripped up  
Poor brutes, who writhing fell and brought to earth  
Their gallant riders.

Corso Donati, still  
Obedient to his chief, impatiently  
Had watched the field—now as spectator stood  
No longer. " Men," cried he aloud, " are we  
To look thus tamely on, so we may pour

\* *Vide* Napier, " Flor. Hist."

In ears of Florentines the dismal tale  
Of this day's drear defeat and comrades' death?  
Or must I risk my head to save the day?  
Let us but charge, and if we fail—we die  
With brothers bravely; or, if victory  
God grant us, I for disobedience then  
The penalty will pay, and let who will  
Come to Pistoria for my head."

These words,  
Scarce said, when he and his two hundred knights  
Dashed deeper into the fight. Guido Novello,  
The Ghibelline's brave Bishop's hope, first stayed,  
Then fled. The priestly soldier saw all lost,  
And we at last sought death in one mad charge.  
The day was ours! O! had we pushed our steps  
On to Arezzo then, our blades still wet  
Would well have forced an entrance to the town.\*  
Delays are dangerous e'en to conquerors,  
For hours are sharpest weapons to thinking foes.  
Faster than spider's web are spun fresh hopes,  
Fresh plots and plans, by busy brains, while winds  
Are drying drops on sword and helm and lance.  
Unless through lengthened reign of peace it comes,  
The rust that dims knights' arms dishonoureth soul.  
Faith! Campaldino's battle taught me more  
Than all the lore of chivalry I learnt  
Through youth. It was a glorious fight.

*Guido.*

Why sigh,

\* For an account of the famous battle of Campaldino, *vide* Napier, "Flor. Hist."



As if to thee a twelve months' lapse from war  
Seemed centuries? If thou cravest strife, fight Love.

*Dante.* My prisoned sighs burst forth from my dark  
heart

Like slaves long pent up in cold cell ; but war  
Was not the jailor that undid their bars.  
'Twas Love who broke their chains, ope'd wide the door.  
The thought that I could so forget my woe  
As to be prating of a fight gone by  
When light of one fair star waning apace,  
Brings contrite heaviness unto my heart.

*Guido.* Sweet Beatrice lieth sick, 'tis true ;  
But herbs and potions may restore her strength.

*Dante.* The jealous angels hover near her couch,  
Longing to bear her soul to heavenly heights.

*Guido.* Should leech-craft fail to heal her sickness, be  
Too proud to yield grief's victim, though disarmed  
By Love.

*Dante.* She cannot die! Though all the hosts  
Of white winged spirits and halo crownèd saints  
In golden garb with holy harps sing low,  
Hymning enthralling welcomes to her ear,  
My love will charm her back to earth again.  
She must not die, for in her lives such good  
That with her death would most untimely perish  
A hundred virtues, gentle words and deeds,  
Which yet unborn would later bless our race.

*Guido.* Count not the sick as dead, nor dead as buried.  
Come, show me what thy pencil has been doing.

*Dante.* A seraph head that like my lady looks.



The eyes gaze at me plaintively. O eyes !  
Would ye were beaming now with gentle sport !

[*Exeunt.*

*Enter* DINO BRUNINI.

*Dino.* Poor fools ! Fair Cesca Eve, and Marco Adam,  
Each vaunting of their new-found paradise.  
Let them once taste of the forbidden fruit  
Satiety, and each will quick spy out  
The other's nakedness of soul. Sew leaves  
Of manners and of forms to hide Love's bareness,  
'Twill yet peep out through most elaborate stitching.  
Love is at best but restless, flitting guest ;  
Clip close his wings to hold him all thine own,  
Love's no more love, from god to changeling turned ;  
But let him near thee, poised on outstretched wing,  
And wildly beats thy heart to win him thine.  
Let humdrum souls prate on in drowsy tones  
Of joys of household loves. To me the kiss  
Stolen at midnight from reluctant lips  
Of some coy maid, is worth full thousandfold  
The known embraces of a wedded wife.

*Enter* FRANCESCA and MARCO NERLI.

*Dino.* See how the lover lingers still around  
The new-made husband. Fie upon thee, Marco !  
The honeymoon's sweet flavour hangs about  
Thy very steps.

*Franc.* More pity if it's reached  
His heels already. On his lips this morn

Methought that I could taste it still a scrap.

*Marco.* In our hearts, wife, when waneth one fair moon  
Shall rise another sweeter than the first,  
Providing honey lavishly to feed  
Throughout our years of eld that wild bee—Love.

*Dino.* String out your comfits on a silver thread,  
Sugar and moonshine, food for fool or fay ;  
But wait till rage domestic storms—and where  
Are sweets and beams? Melted, dispersed, and gone,  
'Neath rain and thunder.

*Franc.* Now, thou raven-uncle,  
Vainly thou croakest : auguries ill-omen'd  
Fall faintly on ears stopped with Love's sweet songs.  
But let me turn, Cassandra, and foretell  
Thy nearing punishment for flouting Love.  
Thy gibes 'gainst honest wedlock's joys, thy sneers  
At innocence and faithfulness of soul,  
Bring fast their own reward. Before thy time  
Thou shalt grow old ; sharp words are harbingers  
To wrinkles, crooked thoughts work crooked lines  
On smoothest skin, pinched soul gives pinchèd face.  
Thy youth slips by thee unawares : see, here  
And there I spy a crowfoot. Mark thee, uncle,  
Sure as I live there are three hairs turned grey !

*Dino.* Gallimatia ! niece, thy wits wool-gathering  
See all things white. Call Dante here and tell him  
He's lily fair—'twill suit his jocund mood.

*Franc.* Alack ! while we are basking in Love's light,  
He sits within the shadow of Death's gloom,  
Fearing each hour may ring the fatal knell

Of his dear happiness.

*Dino.* And how fares Bice?

*Franc.* Like lily broken by our earth's rude blasts,  
She lies upon a couch, while golden hair  
Like halo frames her features pale. Bid Dante  
Quench hope. [Weeps.]

*Marco.* Alas! thou'lt shed more tears anon.

*Dino.* Shed none, fair niece, until thou hast the knack  
Of weeping diamond drops that gently course  
Down rosy cheek, leaving no stain behind.  
So shun tempestuous grief to keep thy looks  
Worth gazing at by men who prize fair grace.

*Marco.* Ne'er fear, Francesca, that thy looks become  
Unlovely to my sight defaced by woe  
That springs but from a kindly woman's heart.

*Franc.* What if they did? Dost think for twenty thous,  
Much as I hold thee dear, I'd stay one tear  
Affection claims as Beatrice's due,  
Though every drop seared as 'twere molten lead?  
O uncle! thou art not a man, but mass  
Of vanity and selfishness skinned o'er  
With maxims for preserving beauty's tints! [Exit.]

*Marco.* Heed not her passion'd words coined from her  
grief,

But tell sad Dante we will bring him news

Of Bice. I must haste to follow Cesca. [Exit.]

*Dino.* To heed an angry woman's words is like  
Stopping to count the stinging grains of dust  
The east wind bears. Suffice it blows; turn thou  
From blustering blast betimes, and praise the saints

When o'er. Crowfeet? said she—crowfeet—grey hairs?  
The wench is mad! they're ten years off at least!  
The devil's in the witch to drawl of age  
And crooked lines! What if she spied one hair—  
But one that time had bleached? Why tongue it forth  
With zeal to all the ends of Christendom?

*Enter DANTE and GUIDO.*

*Dino.* Now to turn skeleton at lover's feast,  
And whisper shrouds and graves in poet's ear.

*Dante.* Good welcome, Dino! Hast thou seen the  
bride?

How fares thy niece as se'en-night matron?

*Dino.*

Well—

Amorously well. Yet her bread of kisses  
She salts with tears; her love for Marco shares  
With fears for Bice.

*Guido (interrupting, showing picture).* Hast an artist's  
eye?

Note here our poet's dawning taste for art—  
How life shines through the half closed lids. Mark there  
The smile of heaven hovering round the lips?

*Dino.* It seems as messenger with tidings sent  
To some sweet soul on earth like Beatrice.

*Guido.* How grows Uberto? He's a trusty lad!  
Has manhood's down yet shaded lips and cheeks?

*Dino.* The boy still girls it with a fair smooth face.  
He owns more wit than years, yet promises  
To be a youth of mettle. But, alack!

I stumble in my tale. O Dante!—Bice—

*Guido.* What stirring news abroad hangs on thy tongue?

*Dino.* Say rather what sad news I could foretell.

*Guido.* Peace, man!

*Dante.* Nay, out with thy assassin thoughts,  
That, lurking 'neath thy words, clasp cold keen knives  
To stab me through and through the soul. Come forth,  
O murderous thieves, to kill my rest, steal strength.  
Better to face worst foe than live in dread  
Of ambushed ills; so out with all thy fears.  
How fares it now with Beatricé—speak!

*Dino.* Sicker, and like to die.

*Dante.* No, no, not yet!

*Guido.* So runs the rhyme around life's vestment's hem.  
The words "not yet" are woven into fibre  
Of fleshly robe we don at natal hour.  
"Not yet," and still "not yet" is easy read  
E'en in our life's old rags. Show me the day  
When men no longer cry, "not yet!" as death  
Nears chilling breath to paling lip and cheek.

*Dante.* To die—to lie for ever hid from eyes  
That live but for her beauty. No, not yet—  
Not till I've sung my lady's fame to heights  
Untouched by poets yet of any age.

*Guido.* Can sparrow's chirp keep back the floods of  
heaven?  
Can aspen's trembling stop the thunderbolt?  
Can man's weak moaning stay one dart of death?  
Dante, where hides thy loved philosophy?

*Dante.* Go ask the cautious snail, when earthquakes  
rend

The meads and mounts, where lies his trusty shell.

*Guido.* Friend, friend, must all thy future dreams end  
thus?

*Dante.* I have no future if my lady die—  
No dreams, since all the stuff they're made of rots  
Beneath her coffin-lid. Shall worms wax fat  
Upon her dainty limbs? No, no, O God!  
She must not die!

[*Sits at table, his head bowed in his hands.*]

*Enter* MARCO, FRANCESCA, and GIOVANNA.

*Guido.* What news?

*Giov.* She sleeps to wake  
No more!

*Franc.* O bitter death! to rob this earth  
Of such a gem!

*Guido.* Alas! sweet Beatrice!

*Dante* (*rousing himself*). Who is 't calls Beatrice?  
name thrice blest!

Speak, Cesca—what of her? No, no; be silent,  
Lest with thy words my heart-strings snap in twain.

*Franc.* Weep, Dante, weep, for never more shall we  
Be gladdened by sweet Bice's voice on earth!

*Dante.* No hope of keeping still this one bright star  
From heaven? Thou art dazed with grief, Francesca.  
Come, let us to her side—there kneel and pray!

*Guido.* Stay, stay! intrude not on a husband's rights.

*Dante.* Away! there are no rights as strong as Love's.

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She is but mine, still mine—though dying, mine !

*Guido.* Then thine no more unless thou'lt claim the  
dead.

*Dante.* Dead ? Beatrice dead ! my soul escaped  
From me while still my body idly stands  
Lumbering the earth ! As poet I may live—  
As man I die. O Beatrice ! Dead !

[*Swoons.*]

## ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Room in DAL COLLE's house.**Enter VINCENZO DAL COLLE and CORSO DONATI.*

*Dal Col.* Here can we coin our speeches undisturbed,  
Weighing our words, so if there be false weight  
Among them we can sift it out, till naught  
But metal unalloyed be left to cast  
Into our general treasury of thought.  
Vieri, truly as thou saidst, wins way  
Through ducats his commercial skill has gained.

*Corso.* And as a flagon of poor flavoured wine  
Is highly called its tastelessness to hide,  
So Cerchi's poverty of head and heart  
He seeks to cover with fine soldier names.  
But still the mud he's born in sticks to him.  
And let him call it battle-stain—what then?  
We all know mud from blood, unless we squint  
With both our eyes because one varlet cries,  
(*Showing his dirk*) "This through thy scornful heart,  
shouldst thou look straight!"

*Dal Col.* Yet Dante values Cerchi, calls him just.



*Corso.* Ay, Dante, who, forgetting noble birth,  
Renounces rights he's heir to : entering name  
In register with leech and 'pothecary,  
So he may claim the privilege of guild ;  
Mixing with herd he builds his hopes upon.  
'Tis no strange sight to see him fondle, then,  
One of that herd who higher holds his head  
Than rest, by dint of treading on the toes  
Of weaker men. Ay, Dante values him,  
And yet another sayer of small nothings,  
Cavalcanti, that weakling aping strength.

*Dal Col.* His poems do not lack in prettiness.

*Corso.* And lack not bareness too, I'll take my oath.  
Such careless poet's rhymes, like beggar's garb,  
Are picturesque for being out at elbows.  
Dal Colle, these Bianchi one and all  
Must writhe beneath our heels like trodden snakes.

*Dal Col.* But Dante still is ours.

*Corso.* Pray, for how long ?  
These embassies distract him from our cause.  
Perugia, Venice, Sienna claim his thoughts,  
And thus have alienated him from home.  
His growing power in Florence but begets  
The love of more : he lays aside his rank  
To gain the people's will—and then ? Why, then  
He'll rule as despot o'er a cringing crowd.

*Dal Col.* 'Tis true that these past years have shown  
us much—

The poet to a politician turned,  
The noble to plebeian ; while the lover,

Weeping his eyes out o'er his mistress' bier,  
Is safely housed with buxom wife and babes.

*Corso.* Who helped him to domestic ties, but I—  
Did I not give him my own flesh and blood,  
Hoping to thus cement his favour to us?  
And how requites he me for all my pains?  
Leans towards our enemies, grows moodier. Mark,  
There's mischief in his veins; some day 'twill out.  
Some madness bites him to the very bone;  
Beware of even scratch of his, lest fast  
The poison in his blood bring festering ills  
Unto our body, and our party die.

*Dal Col.* His moodiness is naught but poet's madness,  
No more. Against his will he wedded, urged  
By friends who feared he'd waste to shade beneath  
The weighty woe of Beatrice's loss ;  
And though all honour's due to thy fair sister,  
Where'er he be, abroad or by his hearth,  
A shadow rests upon his saddened brow,  
As if his lost love still precedence claimed.

*Corso.* 'Thou givest to the man more than his due.  
Watch well his actions, note the restless spirit  
Impelling him unto his fateful doom.  
He seeks to enlarge the party, dreams of schemes  
Which waking thoughts belie—so phantom plans  
Flit through the cobwebs of his brains. Beware!  
Guido and he will play thee false.

*Dal Col.* Until  
We prove them so, we must still call them friends.  
They come this morn to join our council here.

*Corso.* Unto thy keeping they'll ne'er give their thoughts,  
Should I be there. Let me but stand without,  
And, unobserved, make comment on their speech.

*Dal Col.* Nay, nay, that savours too much of the spy.

*Corso.* We stand in times of doubt ; we need mistrust  
Our nearest kith and kin ; give me my way.

*Dal Col.* Yet for the issue of it I have fears.

*Corso.* Be they forgotten through my wiser faith.

*Enter FRANCESCA.*

*Franc.* Father.

*Dal Col.* What brings thee from thy woman's work ?

*Franc.* So stern a look would frighten smiles away  
From bolder brows than mine, but soon my tale  
Is told. The twins approach—I mean, the poets ;  
Damon and Pythias now ascend the stairs.

*Dal Col.* Say I'm alone, and send them hither.

*Franc.* Alone ?

*Dal Col.* Art thou an echo or my child ?

*Franc.* Or one or other, as it pleases thee.  
But do not, Juno-like, drive out the child,  
Nor, like Narcissus, turn thee from the echo  
With anger or disdain, lest I be left  
Nor child nor echo, nothing but a name.

*Dal Col.* Speed with thy legs, not tongue, girl ! Go !

*Franc.* I'm gone.

[*Exit.*]

*Corso.* Now to my watch, and mark thou well their  
words.

*Dal Col.* I let thee have thy way to prove thou'rt wrong.

*Corso.* And Time will then be judge betwixt us twain.

[*Exit.*

*Dal Col.* Ay, Time, like plough in some old battle-field,  
Keeps turning up most unexpected sights,  
All grim and ghastly, startling placid souls.

*Enter DANTE, GUIDO CAVALCANTI, MARCO NERLI, and  
UBERTO.*

*Uber.* As duteous son, I should be bringing news,  
But having none, bring what is better—Dante.

*Dante.* Thy boy, Dal Colle, has more faith in me  
Than I have in the saints.

*Dal Col.* He needs trust thee.

*Marco.* We need trust many. Still are some as safe  
To trust with plans as cat with cream ; yet men  
Will venture hands in hornets' nest till stung.

*Dante.* 'Tis fatal to the good of Florentines,  
Our factions ne'er unite for city's good.  
We, like ill-seasoned timber, split and split,  
Till there's not left a board amongst us all  
Sound through and through, to stop out enemies  
From stranger towns. This wretched sin of self  
Is stamping out all patriotic aims.  
Our leaders damn their cause as well as souls.  
Such men as Corso——

*Dal Col.* What, thy wife's own brother?

*Dante.* If mine, I'd judge him by his deeds. They're  
ill.

His wit's too wide ; he has more strings to bow  
Than there are tendrils to a sturdy vine.

*Guido.* Trust no such fawner, who, surpassing sophists  
In sophistry, is full of reasons as  
The scented honey-combs of cells, with smile  
Sweet as th' imprisoned liquid gold within,  
Yet from the wood-elves' nectar differing wide ;  
For he who'd rashly sip this traitor's sweets,  
Finds subtle poison creeping through his veins,  
His manhood shrivelling up beneath the touch  
Of feigning friendship's cloak ; like Hercules,  
Fire-wrapped in white robe stained with Nessus' blood.

*Dal Col. (aside).* He's filled the cup of hatred to the  
brim.

*Marco.* I like him not myself ; he seems a snake  
'Neath grass, though still unfelt his sting.

*Dal Col. (aside).* But now

Thou'lt feel it.

*Uber.* Let's forego our jealousies,  
Our petty wrongs, and stand one banded force.

*Dal Col.* Tut, lad ! Could we a just revenge forego  
When deepest wronged ?

*Dante.* Better than waste at home  
The strength God lends us for our country's weal,  
By fighting fellow-citizens when they  
Had not observed some courtesy our due.

*Dal Col.* Thou art a poor one to preach want of pride.

*Dante.* Proud lives of daring deeds bespeak our praise,  
But we are apt to lavish it on men  
Who should claim none. Why must we bow the knee  
To some old noble's son because he bears  
His father's name ? \* Unless with noble's rank

- \* The youth inherits too his sire's virtues,
- \* Noble he's not, and no ancestral coffers
- \* Should be deemed his. How rarely human worth
- \* Climbs topmost branch of genealogic tree !

Nobility in its true essence lives

Alone in virtue, valour, art, and genius.

*Uber.* Thy words shape thoughts of mine to actual  
being,

That long lay hid in crannies of my soul,

Like fern seed in the crevices of ruin,

Starting to life when touched by genial light.

*Marco.* 'Tis true thou hast defined my thoughts as well.

*Dal Col.* A poet's dream is never statesman's craft,  
A party's zeal must colour all its acts.

*Dante.* All patriots' zeal should be their country's too ;  
Ill blood 'twixt neighbours split most honest skulls,  
Destroying wantonly homes rich and poor.  
Still 'stead of cheery mart and street, we gain  
Gardingos to our cost. I would these jars  
Were at an end, and private interests merged  
Into a self-forgetting, noble love  
Of Florence and our Italy, for both  
Should claim our love and lives. As God is one,  
And nature one, and mankind one, so should  
Our nation be but one in speech and thought ;  
Then from our unity would others grow,  
Till Europe, merging to a mighty whole,  
Could challenge continents o'er all the earth,

\* *Vide* Dante's Life and Works.



Supreme in her united strength and love.

*Guido.* Well said. Thy words find echo in my breast.

*Dal Col.* Would papal power approve of such a scheme?

*Dante.* Let Popes look to our souls; but purse and sword

Should fill and empty, rust and shine, without  
Their care. As head of our most holy Church  
Whoever sits, holding the sacred trust,  
Within St. Peter's chair, should sanctify  
His thoughts till naught of worldliness be left  
To mar one act of his pontificate.

*Dal Col.* Be cautious, Dante, for thy speech begins  
To touch on heresy.

*Dante.* In faith, Vincenzo,  
Rank heresy lurks more in hearings than  
In speakings of broad thoughts.

*Dal Col.* Then let us hear  
The less of them. But come, we'll to the table  
And break our fast.

*Dante.* To silence conscience then  
With meats. How oft a stomach newly-filled  
Will prove efficient ally to some sin  
The slothful, self-indulgent imp within us  
Had fruitlessly suggested while we starved.

*Dal Col.* Still we must eat to act. So come.

[*Exeunt DANTE, DAL COLLE, and GUIDO.*]

*Marco.* My lad,  
Our father brooks not such free speech from son.  
Listen and wait.

*Uber.* Till when? Tell me till when.

*Marco.* Till thou hast proved thy wisdom-teeth are through.

*Uber.* Perhaps my others can bite hard enough  
If I but try them on some traitors' hides. [*Exeunt.*]

*Corso (coming from behind curtain).* Bite on, thou  
graceless pup, be cozened still  
By black-browed rhymesters' jargon. Both of ye  
May find Donati's teeth are sound and sharp.  
Dante but thinks his Guido's thoughts aloud.  
I knew the stitch of that embroidered speech ;  
But fawners can use steel as well as smiles  
To dagger home some truths to poet's heart. [*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—*Entrance to a cemetery. Night time.*

*Enter GUIDO CAVALCANTI.*

*Guido.* Here dwell at least some peaceful Florentines ;  
They seek no fight since last with Death they strove,  
And side by side they lie untroubled now,  
Where once they'd hotly clap their hands to thigh,  
And write with swords red answers to a scoff.  
Their pride, revenge, and bloody hates have gone  
Before a mightier Tribune, mightier Judge,  
And manly forms that housed these attributes  
Are dust—ay, dust, what soon we all must be.  
The traitor years too swiftly steal our loves,  
Our strength, and wits, nor leave us barely time



To say in peace, Amen, to Life's short prayer.  
What parent's love I knew came from these bones  
Now crumbling here. In memory of that love  
I honour these poor relics of past days  
With prayers that they may slumber restfully.

[*Exit into cemetery.*]

*Enter CORSO DONATI and Servant.*

*Corso.* Didst say that Guido came this way to-night?

*Serv.* He left the city bent upon this errand.

*Corso.* Then as we passed him not throughout the road  
He must be here. Was that a footstep?

*Serv.*

Nay.

*Corso.* Watch well the gate where saddled stand our  
steeds.

I'll wait thee here, and when I call, haste back.

[*Exit Servant.*]

O envious night, that hides my destined prey  
Still from my itching blade! The cursèd fool!  
Not till my foot rests on his lying throat  
Can my hot thirsting for revenge be sated.  
O! that I had the power to hold this Florence  
Within the hollow of these two strong hands.  
Where then would these Bianchi be? Ask axe  
And flood and faggot, for the grinning crowd  
I'd grind like fragile shell beneath my heel.

*Guido (returning).* Are strangers here?

*Corso.* The dog comes to his doom.

*Guido.* A voice of foe or friend?

*Corso (striking him with sword).* Be that mine answer.

*Guido.* Here's treachery ! Whoe'er thou art—beware !  
*Corso.* Ho ! Lapo, haste ! Now, Guido, breathe thy last.

*Enter* Servant, *who also attacks* GUIDO.

*Guido.* Villains ! you will not find I weakly fall !

*Enter* MARCO.

*Marco.* Swords drawn ? 'Tis Guido's voice, and two  
to one.

'Tis no fair play ; howe'er, we'll make it even.  
Here's one for thee, Ser ; and here's one for thee.

[*LAPO falls.*

*Guido.* Ha ! now I know thee, Corso. Try my steel,  
If so inclined.

*Marco.* And mine.

*Corso.* Hell take ye both ! [*Exit.*

*Marco.* But first go there thyself. How's this ; he's  
gone !

*Guido.* And so this varlet, but from earth instead.

*Marco.* The traitors !

*Guido.* Friend, but for thy timely help  
I'd now be lying stiff too at thy feet.

*Marco.* my thanks are thine beyond cold words.

*Marco.* 'Tis well I passed this way. Among the hills  
My mother lives ; to-day I spent with her.  
She ages fast, and begs me to bring Cesca  
Unto her arms. At first, thou knowest how  
Dal Colle won me, prating of his love  
For Cesca—vowing he'd ne'er part from her.  
All this fond show of father's care disguised

But craving for my gold. I'm not content  
Within his walls, and Cesca wills my will.  
So mother's ears to-day I gladdened with  
The news of our home-coming swift to her.  
And wending back my steps to Florence, heard  
Thy voice ; so, leaping from my horse, I sped  
To rescue thee.

*Guido.* Most opportunely too,  
As my whole bones can testify with thanks.  
My doting spouse will tend thee hero-worship.

*Marco.* We'll haste to town and tell this tale to Dante.  
He'd rather have himself attacked than thee !

*Guido.* A poet, statesman, friend, philosopher,  
All blend in him to make one perfect whole.  
A weighty debt does Florence owe our Dante.

*Marco.* Which she will easily forget to pay. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*Room in DANTE'S house at Florence.* FRAN-  
CESCA NERLI and GEMMA ALLIGHIERI *embroidering.*

*Franc.* We must be patient, Gemma. We poor women,  
To lead glad lives, should suck in patience with  
Our mother's milk, upon it cut our teeth,  
Be woo'd and wed, and bear our babes upon it.  
It is the *Credo*, *Paternoster*, *Ave*,  
Of honest woman's household life. With love  
Walks patience hand-in-hand, till sweet is service  
That else would grow past bearing. Headstrong oft

And passionate was I from my youth, yet learnt  
To school my hasty will for Marco's sake.  
The knowledge of his love crowns all my life,  
Sweet'ning each cup of pain, removing woes,  
And smoothing roughness in life's crooked path.  
My faith is orthodox in two beliefs—  
My God and Marco. My Creator first  
Hath heart and mind and soul, and then my husband.

*Gemma.* Thou canst well patience preach; thy home  
is happy.

*Franc.* Truly my cup of joy nigh runneth o'er  
With love of spouse and child. Our little son  
Is blessed sunshine to our wedded hearts.  
Yet patience, even with the greatest love,  
Has work to do. Imperfect are we all;  
So Marco bears with me, and I with Marco.

*Gemma.* Thou hast not wretchedness to bear like mine.

*Franc.* And whence this woe? Around thy chair  
creep children.

Dost thou not glory that their father's Dante?

*Gemma.* Proud of his deeds am I, but he as spouse  
Would madden holiest saint. For days and days  
He scarce will smile, forgetting wife and babes,  
Gazing at us as at some stranger guests.  
Dreaming he sits at table, taking what  
We offer him, then starts as from a trance,  
And takes his tablets from his pouch and writes.

*Franc.* To this abstraction he was ever prone.  
Well I remember how we twitted him  
Adown and up poor Folco's scented alleys

For losing all the gayest sights in Florence.  
Once gone to watch the gorgeous cavaliers,  
Pedestrians, singers, in one glittering throng,  
That wound its way like shining snake through square  
And narrow street, he stood within a shop  
Whose only wares were books ; and as the long  
Procession neared in sight, a pamphlet spying  
Yet new to him, our poet seized the book  
And, lost in thought, read on. When from his hand  
He laid it down the show was past and gone—  
The crowd, the splendid train of horse and men—  
Unseen, unthought of by the dreamer, Dante ! \*

*Gemma.* To know this malady of his is old  
Helps not my woe. Would that he were more like  
Most other men !

*Franc.* Nay, where we love, e'en faults  
To virtues almost grow in husbands. Mine  
Will wonder where I tarry so to gossip  
Unless I leave thee soon.

*Gemma.* Why, pray, such haste ?

*Enter DANTE.*

Use thy persuasive tongue to beg her stay.

*Dante.* Madonna Cesca, where away so fast ?

*Franc.* To household service. Should the fruit be piled  
Less high or low than yestern, Marco'd note it,  
And say, "No Cesca's touch is here." Ah ! Gemma,  
The counsel that I gave thee fold about

\* This incident is related in Dante's Life.



Thy very heart. Dear friends, again farewell ! [Exit.

*Dante.* Is she, then, happy ? Marco's kind, but stern  
Her father e'er. 'Tis well she soon seeks haven  
With Nerli's kin.

*Gemma.* Thou didst not urge her stay  
With friendly warmth.

*Dante.* What hospitality  
This house affords she knows is hers ; through days  
Gone by I've called both her and Marco friends.

[Seats himself.

*Gemma.* E'er dreaming of that past—the "now" forgot  
In fatal "then." As one in sleeping lies  
Unconscious of the actual life around.  
Mark how his brows are knit, how strange the smile  
That creeps about his lips. There come the tablets !  
This mighty poem born this year fills me  
With awe unspeakable. If impious, then  
What vengeance dire may Heaven not deal to him !  
(Touching him) Dante ! What of the news ?

*Dante.* Away, thou fiend !

*Gemma.* Sweet Mary, save us ! Would that fiend could  
pinch

Thee back to earth, when wandering, God knows where !

*Dante.* I knew thee not.

*Gemma.* Not thy own bone of bone,  
Thy flesh of flesh ? Next thou'lt not know thyself !

*Dante.* O woman ! find me then the man who does.

*Gemma.* The more thou meditat'st, more mad art thou.  
Clowns, with their love, can cheer poor wives' hearts  
more

O'er black bread and goat's cheese than thou canst mine  
O'er red Vernaccia, spite of all thy learning!  
Care I how tortured spirits feel in hell?

*Dante.* Thou tortur'st mine.

*Gemma.* Or how souls sing in heaven?

*Dante.* Would I were there.

*Gemma.* All folly, naught but folly.

*Dante.* Thou canst not understand the mandates given  
To poets by their goddess poesy,  
Or know how vain 'twould be to strive against  
The god-like promptings of a poet's soul,  
And sink from sacred heights to mundane levels.

*Gemma.* Canst ne'er speak prose? Why daily clothe  
thy thoughts

In strangest garb, as if thy wits played fool  
At masquerade, where no man knows a maid  
From matron. Fie on poet's mutterings!

*Dante (to himself).* If, then, the soul absorbed at last to  
whole——

*Gemma.* Fie, fie! I say. Art thou bewitched?

*Dante.* O! peace.

*Gemma.* Dost deem me deaf and dumb?

*Dante.* O! that thou wert.

*Gemma.* Dost wish me dead as well? O! Dante,  
Dante!

Am I to think thee callous as a stone?

*Dante.* Contentious woman and continual drops,  
They say, will wear out man and stone at last.

*Gemma.* Wilt thou malign thy wife?

*Dante.* So souls absorbed——

*Gemma.* Distraught again! O! 'vextious, wicked lot :  
Thy dreaming, Dante, makes my dreariness. [Exit.

*Dante.* Ay, this is truth : the sun sucks up from sea  
The tender mists ; in sky's soft bosom nourished,  
They turn to glistening drops, and fall as rain  
On parchèd field and thirsty flower below.  
Anon they mingle with the sea's salt wave,  
Once more becoming part of what they were.  
So souls sucked up from out life's surging sea  
By Heaven's sun, absorbed in glorious ray.  
Fed on the Tree of Life in Paradise,  
When perfect grown, must these new spirits swing  
The incense of their love and praise alone  
In heavenly domes? Shall not some holy breath  
Be wafted down from them to earth again,  
Sweet'ning our lives and cleansing it from sin,  
And so let beings above by mystic tie  
Be knit to what they were in living men?  
O Beatrice! such pure soul as thine  
Needs lower stoop than most to reach us here ;  
And yet thou stoop'st to soothe my restless spirit,  
Who least am worthy of beatic bliss.  
When tempest-tost with passions, thine the power  
To still the demons of despair and wrath.  
One thought of thee drives sin and sorrow far,  
As morning sun dispels the summer mists.  
Living, thy presence blessed my eyes and heart—  
And dead, thy mem'ry purifies the soul.  
Out of my endless grief, my sore unrest,  
A monument shall rise that bears thy name,



Such as no woman ever had before,  
As none shall ever know again on earth.

(*Starting*) Who spoke of muttering? Gemma, was it thou?

*Gemma (returning)*. Art thou awake again?

*Dante*. If I to thee  
With shade of anger spoke, forgive me, wife.

*Gemma*. Turn but thy gaze on us who love thee,  
then

There'd little need forgiveness to be shown.

*Dante*. Love I thee less than when we wedded? Nay,  
Not so. My home is much to me, and more  
My wife and children. Dost believe this, Gemma?

*Gemma*. Most willingly my ears drink in thy words;  
But woman's heart is weak, and needs man's love  
To lean upon, and when thou silent art  
Great fears o'erwhelm my soul, like floods drowning  
My timid joys, that else would thrive in sunshine.

*Dante*. Fear not, good wife; what love is left is thine.  
But long ago my heart lost its best powers.

*Gemma*. I plighted troth to thee content to live  
My wedded life in peace, if thou but show  
In trivial daily deeds what love thou'st left.  
Hark! to those sounds that rise from street below!

*Dante*. Some brawlers by the way. Such roysterers' din  
Should soon familiar grow. 'Tis matin hymn  
And evensong of Florence in these times.

*Gemma*. Louder and louder! hear the tramp of feet!

*Voices outside*. Now, Neri! to the wall with the Bianchi!  
Bianchi to the rescue! down with Neri!

*Dante.* Again! O! for the power to quell these  
strifes! [Going.

*Gemma.* Venture not out among the warring crowd.  
O! turn thy steps; thou canst not heal this feud.

*Dante.* It must be healed, or else our city's doomed.  
Poor Florence bleeds from her internal wounds,  
Aimed at her very life by coward knaves  
Who call themselves her champions and her sons.

*Gemma.* Nay, go not, I entreat thee!  
[Throws her arms around him.

*Dante.* Nay, unclasp me!

*Enter GUIDO.*

*Guido.* Where to so fettered, friend?

*Dante.* To spoil thy sport.  
Thrice now within two days have thy men come  
To blows with Corso's. Cease this endless strife!

*Guido.* And spare th' assassin? Wouldst thou see  
this fiend  
Sheathe deep his knife into my breast? Till now  
I dreamt that Dante valued friends, and turned  
His dagger 'gainst the hand that sought their lives.

[GEMMA retires up stage.

*Dante.* That I do love thee is an old, old song  
Unto thine ears; that I hate Corso is  
No newer one, though he be bound to me  
By ties of blood; that all who seek thee harm  
Are branded as foul traitors in my heart  
Is also truth; but justice claims its dues  
In preference to friendship. Florence bleeds

Through rival factions. For our city's good  
We should preach peace, and peace, and ever peace.

*Guido.* First right the mighty social wrong that bred  
From ignorance, like some great monster rears  
A hydra-headed front against all peace,  
And taints the air with its vile scorching breath.

*Dante.* Can single-handed men strive with such foe ?  
Forget thy private wrongs, forego thy hate,  
Till with one voice we Florentines can cry,  
Shouting defiance at all foreign rats  
Who gnaw into the stronghold of our rights.

*Guido.* A stranger listening would accredit me  
With naught of patriotic zeal ; yet once  
Thou deemedst me touched with sacred fire.

*Dante.*

Yet once ?

Thou hast it now, if fairly roused to action ;  
But daily broodings over party feuds  
Are stifling nobler aims. Be not like some  
Poor slothful souls, pride-puffed and satisfied,  
That count their virtues to their secret selves  
As misers slily count their hoarded wealth,  
Putting these golden treasures ne'er to use.

*Guido.* Here speaks philosopher and preacher, 'stead  
Of poet. Come, the pulpit waits thy sermons !

*Dante.* None should be poet deemed who blends not  
truths

With all the gifts imagination dowers.  
Did I not preach, no poet's crown were mine ;  
At poesy's court I'd stand but jester dull,  
Instead of thronèd king.

*Guido.* Will preaching peace  
Unsay foul words, stay enmities, put up  
Unsheathed sword, and flaming faggot quench?

*Gemma.* E'en women nurse their wrath in bitter breast.  
Can proud Donati, Vieri's words forget  
Said at the feast? \*

*Dante.* Cease from such gossip, wife.

*Guido.* Until to-morrow, when the tale's retold.

*Dante.* To-morrow we must end these savage brawls.

*Guido.* To-morrow, then, must see our city changed,  
Or else our hope is vain. How calm such strife  
While we be men and high our passions run?

*Dante.* Let them run high to overflowing—but  
Without the walls of Florence. Guido—wait! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—*Square of Signoria. People gathering.*  
Citizens, Soldiers

*1st Cit.* What means this hasty summons? what new  
wrongs

Are we to right, or what new rights to wrong?

*2nd Cit.* Last night 'twas said that the Priori met  
To council hold here in the square this morn.  
'Tis noon—behold me, Beppo Bianco, leave  
My bales t' unpack themselves, and wait with arms  
Akimbo to be asked why came I here!  
As yet the reason is as clear to me

\* *Vide Appendix.*

As addled eggs to housewife.

*3rd Cit.* Thine own pate  
Must addled be if thou knowest not that Dante  
Called citizens to meet him here to-day.

*2nd Cit.* My addled pate ! Let's try if thine be clearer.

*1st Cit.* Put up thy swords. Peace ! let us hear why  
Dante  
Has called us hither.

*4th Cit.* He is wise, our poet,  
And governs well ; he cares for common weal.

*6th Cit.* He joined thy guild, O thou most valiant  
Lapo ;  
And has he tasted of thy salves and pills ?

*4th Cit.* Sound limbs may laugh at the apothecary,  
But wounds and aches creep gladly to our doors.

*5th Cit.* Then let me gladden thy dull carcase.

*3rd Cit.* Hold !  
Here Dante comes, and the Priori with him.

*5th Cit.* Let's nearer.

*Several voices.* Room ! make room ! give way,  
you varlets !

*Soldiers.* Stand back then,—stand back—make way for  
your betters !

*Enter Priori, DANTE, and principal Citizens.*

*Corso (to DAL COL.).* This new device means mischief  
in the wind.

*Dal Col.* Yet Dante's just. First let us hear his speeches,  
Then judge.

*Corso.* First velvet paws, then felt the claws.

*Guido (to MARCO).* So strangely roused was Dante  
yestere'en,  
He scarce would hear me patiently, nor knew  
The devil was abroad and lodging in  
That beast Donati.

*Marco.* Calm thyself, thou'rt heard.

*Dante.* My friends, when I did ask that we should  
meet,

'Twas for no idle jest. We do not need  
Some strange new pageant—no gay lords of love,  
With train of white-robed votaries. Bright joys  
Belong to calmer hours than these. We need  
Our grandsires' days, when high dames simply spun,  
In distaff glorying more than in their jewels—  
\* When painted face was deemed a sore disgrace,  
\* And women for simplicity were loved ;  
\* When proudest noble clasped his cloak with bone,  
\* And girded waist with leathern belt ; when men  
\* Felt not the want of costly habiliments.  
Possessions have their worth, but they are naught  
Compared to virtues. Think ye money-bags  
Have handed honoured names down to these times ?  
We learn that Socrates scarce owned three minae.†  
Would these few ducats satisfy our greed ?  
Yet are we wiser than great Plato's master ?  
We need what served our sires—strong sinews, nerves  
Of iron, with brave hearts and unity.  
Our town is daily menaced by fierce foes ;

\* "Par." c. 15.

† About £9. 10s., or \$47. 50 cts.



We must unite to-day within her walls.  
If we would conquer enemies without,  
We must unite to show St. Peter's Vicar  
That of the Church we are true sons, that ne'er  
Is Florentine by quenched, inverted torch  
Sent to unhonoured grave \*—unite to show  
The rulers of the world we hold our own  
Against all pow'rs. We must unite for strength ;  
These sad divisions mine our city's force,  
Like glacial cracks which split the avalanche  
That had resisted centuries of storms,  
By its internal parting rent at last  
From lofty mountain that it proudly crowned,  
And in its fall annihilates itself  
As well as country that it falls upon.  
In vain we call on patron saint, St. John,  
And trust as guardian he'll protect the town,  
While in our hearts are lingering bitter hates,  
Proclaiming us yet worshippers of Mars,  
Whose statue still adorns the Ponte Vecchio.  
These party zeals are like the mountain streams  
Which green the banks they touch, and turn the mills  
Of use to farms and hamlets. Grander far  
As tributaries to some noble river  
That, bearing commerce on its bosom, sweeps,  
Broad'ning its lordly course, to open sea.  
The Neri, Bianchi, Guelph, and Ghibelline,  
May influence some towns ; but they should merge

\* Persons excommunicated were buried with extinguished and inverted torches.

Into one mighty stream of thought and act—  
One grand harmonious whole, one Italy,  
Bearing its wealth, its might, in glorious triumph  
To the great tossing ocean of the world.  
Jove's nectar from no valley vine is prest,  
But from the grapes that scale the highest crag ;  
The perfect life of man is ne'er attained  
By lying in damp bog or stagnant ditch.  
We must attempt great heights if we would reach  
E'en modest molehills ; we must climb and climb  
To lift our robes above the common mire.  
If we would earn proud line in history,  
We must attempt the greatest conquest known—  
The conquest of ourselves. Our petty feuds,  
Our paltry hates, must lie as sacrifice  
On altar of our country's good ; our flames  
Must burn alone to light a holier fire—  
The beacon of our liberty—which, lit,  
Shall brighten eyes unclosing centuries hence.  
Have we forgotten, friends, our mission here—  
\* That man's work is, if pure, almost divine ?  
\* According to the saying that he's made  
\* But little lower than angelic hosts.  
\* And to apply man's heart best to his work,  
\* He must exist in calmness of sweet peace.  
\* Hence it is true that to secure the best  
\* Of blessings to mankind is to bestow  
\* Upon them peace ; and so to shepherds came

\* "De Monarchia."



- \* On our first Christmas Eve that word from heaven.
- \* Not honour, length of life, strength, beauty, wealth,
- \* But "Peace" sang angels loud, "Glory to God
- \* In highest, on the earth peace unto men."
- \* And "Peace be with you," salutation was
- \* Of our Lord Christ, for it behovèd Him,
- \* As greatest Saviour, in this greeting sweet
- \* To bless us with the best of blessings—peace !

Therefore, O citizens, we come to-day  
 Deciding how we best can peace secure  
 For Florence, now with civil discord rent.  
 And I and my colleagues this paper bring  
 To be here signed : an ordinance by which  
 The inciters of these party feuds be banished,  
 As baneful to the welfare of the town.

*Corso.* Banished ? and who dare banish *us* ?

*Dante.*

Thy speech

Betrays thine own perception of the wrong  
 Thou hast done Florence.

*Guido.*

Will this, then, be signed ?

*Dal Col.* We can no more lay claim to our own souls

If one man's breath blows us without these walls.

*Dino.* What say the priors ?

*Marco.*

Ay, let them now speak.

*A Prior.* As spokesman for the rest, I do attest

That we agree with Dante's reasoning ;

My name shall witness this.

[*Signs.*

*Other Priors.*

And mine, and mine. [*They sign.*

\* "De Monarchia."

*A Prior.* And thus we hope to lessen future bloodshed.

*Dante.* Let's pierce but traitor hearts, not citizens,  
Neighbours, and kindred ; let our hands but meet  
In friendly grasp ; if we seek exercise  
For hip and heel, let's try the Ridda's maze,\*  
And weary limbs to lightsome tune and verse.

*Corso.* 'Tis well for those who stay at home to cry,  
"Dance ! dance ! Shake merry tambourines aloft,  
And clap glad castanets !" But what of those  
Who wend abroad their weary steps from Florence ?

*Dino.* Whose name stands written on that fateful list ?  
[Lays his hand on the ordinance.

*Corso.* Let Florentines decide who best should drink  
From foreign wells, who best eat exile's bread.

*A Prior.* We have decided for the people.

*Corso.* Then,  
'There needs no tremor shake these legs of mine ;  
The people's choice, the soldier's friend, the man  
Who risked his head on Campaldino's plain  
For our town's sake, needs be her trusty friend.

*Soldiers.* Ay, ay, he is our friend. Long live the  
Baron !

*Guido.* Then long live strife, deceits, and lying words.

*Corso.* Thou cur !

*Dante.* Your quarrel end without these walls.

*Corso.* What, I ?

*Guido.* I, Dante ?

*Dante.* Both of ye must hence.

\* The *Ridda* was an old song and dance.

*Dal Col.* Must noble Corso now forsake our cause ?

*Marco.* What, Dante's intimate share common fate  
Of Dante's foe ?

*Dino.* He loves the golden mean,  
Nor chooses day nor night, but twilight dim,  
Or dawn, dull shadows grey, cold, meaningless.

*Guido.* And thus does Dante prove his love for friends ?

*Dante.* Before the paradise of friendship stands  
An angel with a mighty flaming sword,  
And "duty," "justice," are his warning words.  
Ere heart of mine can give one beat for thee,  
It needs must throb a hundred times for Florence.  
And yet, O Guido ! if thou couldst but know  
How much my heart does daily throb for thee,  
'Twould ease thy pain at turning face from home.

*Guido.* Tell me of thy heart's love when thy mind acts  
In unison with that love.

*Corso.* *Now* scratch the claws,  
And where's the velvet ?

*Dal Col.* Nay, be patient, Corso ;  
Wait, wait, be patient ; all may change to-morrow.

*Corso.* Oft patience of to-day conceives regret  
That kills to-morrow in the bringing forth.

*Dino (to MARCO).* Next we may amble exiled toes and  
heels  
On foreign soil.

*Marco (aside).* *Thou* couldst, my friend, long since,  
If thou hadst favoured politics 'stead puddings.

*Dante.* Here let us part still friends. Necessity,  
Not malice, prompts our acts ; a mightier far

Than we controls this hour. 'Tis Florence speaks,  
Beseeching peace, and in that name, depart!

[*Exeunt* DANTE and Priors.

*Corso* (*fiercely*). To hell with thee! It is of that thou  
singest,

There wert begotten, there dost thou belong!

*Dal Col.* If sent by thee, surely he'll never go.  
Thou'dst better learn thy passions to subdue.

*Corso.* Subdue? Ask famished beggar not to hunger  
When wheaten loaf before his eyes be held,  
Ask prisoned drunkard not to thirst when wine  
Is poured between his bars. Ask libertine  
To seek no kiss when chance a beauty throws  
Into his arms. Subdue? When every word  
That arch-fiend Dante spoke was dagger thrust  
Into this heart, and stirred its molten depths,  
Kindling its smould'ring flame until the fire  
Of passions long pent-up broke forth anew.  
Subdue? Myself into another world!  
Crush out all my party zeal, raze walls of Florence,  
Let strangers steal our daughters, slave our sons,  
While we sing "Thank ye" on our knees! Subdue?  
Ay—pray subdue the winds, and waves, and fire,  
The heavens and earth, the Church, hell and the devil!

[*Exit.*

*Dal Col.* Stay his speed. Dino, haste—hie after him!

*Dino.* Were he the prettiest wench that ever smiled,  
I'd none of him in such a wilful mood.

*Dal Col.* Ay, wine and wenches are the only *Aves*

And *Paternosters* learnt in thy dull creed.

[*Exit.*

*Dino.* Starved ass outshines oft politician fed,  
For at his worst the beast is but an ass,  
While politician is both ass and devil!

*Guido (crossing with MARCO).* He bids us wave the  
olive-branch, and sends  
Us both as sheep to slaughter unprepared.  
O enmity! thy bitterness is sweet  
Compared to friendship's gall: *this*, Christ did drink  
When Peter turned and knew Him not—till cup  
The soldiers later jeering gave seemed honey.

*Marco.* Weigh not a friendship by the personal pain  
A friend may give. Judge ne'er the act, but cause,  
And rather seek to find the fault in self  
Than doubt leal love, and leave the rest to God.

[*Exeunt. The crowd closes in.*]

END OF ACT I.

## ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Ante-chamber of Pope Boniface VIII. in Rome.*

*Enter CORSO DONATI, DINO BRUNINI, and followers.*

*Dino.* Solve me this riddle : Is His Holiness  
The spider—we lost flies in mesh of web :  
Within, charmed centre where the papal palate  
Must pampered be till gorged ? or art thou spider  
Stealing into the sacred flies' domains,  
To fatten on old Rome's discomfiture ?

*Corso.* Keep thy dry nuts of wit home-teeth to jar.  
'Tis business grave that calls me to the Pope.

*Dino.* Thou'lt urge the pontiff plead the Neri's cause  
With Charles de Valois, him whom Philip sends \*  
To overthrow Sicilian Ghibellines ;  
Once let this Charles of France turn arms 'gainst  
Florence,

Then may the miscreant Bianchi weep their fill.

*Corso.* And laugh the Neri till sides split with joy.

*Dino.* Thus full of plans thou layest pleading hand  
On papal skirt—war, power, revenge thy theme.

\* Philip the Fair, brother of Charles de Valois.



But pleasure is my only business here,  
So riddles roll off tongue as rings slip off  
Wet finger—jest and pranks my bill-o'-fare.

*Corso.* Dish thy dull dinner, then, these walls without ;  
Here tread we far too close to holy toes.

[*Withdraws up stage, conversing with followers.*]

*Dino.* May Church's padding keep kicks off the  
corns ! [ *With mock brow.* ]

The Baron angered ! Body o' Bacchus ! Ser,  
Thou art but quicksand of false pride, pitfall  
Of seething passions, prickly hedge of tempers !  
How warring spirits love to shave their souls,  
Till not one hair of conscience bristles still  
To show they might once boast of being man !

*Enter CARDINAL, attended.*

*Card.* Messer Corso, the Holy Church salutes thee !

*Corso.* May I salute the Church's Holy Father ?

*Card.* Anon, my son, anon. His Holiness  
Hath weighty matter to digest to-day.  
An embassy from Florence reaches Rome  
This morn, with Dante as its delegate.

*Corso.* The Vale so sends unto the Seven Hills,  
The Forest to the Altar.\* Let us pray  
Each stick be Isaac bound for sacrifice  
Of its sweet self, a savoury offering  
Unto the God of Justice——

*Card.* But a ram  
In the pontific thicket might be caught.

\* *Vide* Appendix.

*Corso.* Please heaven that *I* prove not the scape-goat, then.

*Card.* Nay, Ser, how could the cause exist without  
The Baron—flower of chivalry, whose deeds  
Of prowess, golden speech combined, create  
A new St. Chrysostom, second St. George?

*Corso.* Thy courteous words, Lord Cardinal, portend  
A favourable granting of my suit.

*Card.* The Holy Father truly favours thee,  
But 'twixt these rival factions wishes peace.

*Corso.* Let Charles's sword the reconciler be.

*Enter Page.*

*Page.* His Holiness desires Ser Corso come.

*Card.* Good fortune wait on thee.

*Corso.* Thanks for the wish.  
[*Exeunt.*

*Dino.* Will my Lord Cardinal deign me a word?

*Card.* One of Donati's followers?

*Dino.* Not so.

I follow none, but am a foe to none.

*Card.* Thy business here?

*Dino.* With well-filled purse I roam,  
Tasting the cream of joy each town affords.

*Card.* Taste to the full, then, from our Roman dairies,  
And kindly welcome earn while purse is heavy.

[*Withdraws up stage.*

*Dino.* A proper Cardinal. Commend me to  
Such jocund Churchmen. Varlet! here, take this,  
[*Gives paper to boy.*



And hie thee to the Dona Mira's house.  
Haste back with answer. (*Exit boy.*) Maids and dames  
are same  
In Rome as Florence—pester me with looks  
And too good suppers, upshot of possessing  
A well-turned leg, fair face, and winning tongue!

*Enter DANTE and followers.*

*A fol.* And here the Cardinal awaits thee.

*Dante (aside).*

Fox!

Guarding the lion's den. Now for the truth.  
(*Advancing*) Lord Cardinal, we greet thee from fair  
Florence.

*Card.* Most welcome, noble Dante. Rome embraces  
Illustrious guests. The Holy Father gladly  
Desires thy presence, Ser.

*Dante.*

Does he desire

The granting of my suit as gladly?

*Card.*

Surely,

He seeks to reconcile contending feuds.

*Dante.* That's difficult.

*Card.*

But Mother Church ignores

It's difficult.

*Dante.*

Unto the Church I bow,

Trusting her keener judgment will spy out  
Solution where my poorer sight has failed;  
For we Bianchi dread the Neri's claims,  
And need the papal strong authority.

*Card.* Be thou assured all justice will be done,  
And Neri well uprooted should they prove

Obnoxious to the welfare of the State.  
First thy credentials let me bear within,  
Anon I'll summon thee unto the Pope.

*DANTE gives papers to the CARDINAL, who goes into  
Boniface's room.*

*Dino.* Good morrow! (*DANTE does not notice him.*)

Well, has speech those pages followed  
Into that ravenous maw, the proud priest's pocket?  
Good-morrow, neighbour! Shall I send for leech  
To cure thy deafness, loose thy tongue? (*Louder*)  
Good e'en!

*Dante.* I marked thy whining, but it scarce did stir  
The atmosphere about—so light thy words,  
So weighty all my thoughts.

*Dino.* Come, come, I'll share them.

*Dante.* Thou share them! Can toads fly?

*Dino.* Ay, in a shower.

*Dante.* Then witchcraft only launched them through  
the air

To pitch them back into their proper puddles.  
No wing bore such from earth. Can thy thoughts fly?

*Dino.* Ay, to my dinner.

*Dante.* Fly, then, with thy thoughts.

[*Retires up stage.*]

*Dino.* What gentle wit, what dainty courtesy!  
I love that man—to canonizing him!

*Enter CORSO and CARDINAL.*

*Card.* With this assurance leave the issue safe  
In Boniface's hands. [*Re enters Pope's room.*]

*Corso.* I'll venture it!

(*Seeing DANTE*) So, so, we meet again.

*Dante.* As much good friends  
As when we parted.

*Corso.* Ser! I cry thee quits.  
The friendship was of thy conceiving then.

*Dante.* Say enmity, if that will suit thee best.

*Corso.* As nearer truth, if truth can lodge near thee.

*Dante.* Proud man, I only banished thee from home.  
Beware thy sins exile thee not from heaven.

*Corso.* Thou'rt my worst sin. Would I could exile it!

*Dino.* 'Tis sweet to note these doting doves converse.

*Dante.* Peace with thy ribaldry!

*Enter CARDINAL.*

*Card.* The Holy Father  
Desires thy presence. Come, illustrious Dante.

*Dante.* Ever his servant, I obey his hest.

(*To CORSO*) Plot on, intriguer, play thy petty moves.

'Twill take a wit far subtler than thine own

To checkmate me, Durante Allighieri.

*[Exeunt DANTE and CARDINAL.]*

*Corso.* Patience, my soul, patience, and curb thyself.

Let not my tongue give vent to turbulence

Seething in veins at poet's insolence.

I still can wait. Some weeks may change this tale.

And now to hasten deeds, securing Charles.

*Dino.* The Prince?

*Corso.* Of darkness—if thou question me.

Sniff not my pie with thy too curious nose ;

Poleemics are above thy sated tastes.

(*To his followers*) Now, friends, we'll to my quarters.

Haste to work ! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*A Nobleman's house at Rome.* DINO BRUNINI  
*with Nobles feasting.* Pages, Dancing-girls.

SONG.

Drink !

To Mars, the god of wars and blood,

High to him in ruby flood,

To the brink

Of goblet gold with sapphires gemmed.

Fill ; let not a drop escape.

Offer him the blood of grape.

Mars—we drink !

Drink !

To Venus, goddess fairest found,

Braced in beauty, cestus-bound,

Goblets chink !

To floating hair and open lids,

To marble limbs no vestments drape.

Offer her the bloom of grape.

To her drink !

Drink !

To Pluto—for our passion's fire  
Is his, and that mad wines inspire.

To the brink !

Fill high to god of lowest hell ;  
By fair Proserpine's rude rape,  
Offer him the fumes of grape.

Pluto drink !

Drink !

For in the cup lie fame and wars  
Mightier than the gift of Mars.

Goblets chink !

Drain Pluto's fire in ruddy flood,  
Or let the fumes with fancy shape  
A Venus from the amber grape.

Ever drink !

*1st Noble.* A lordly song, well sung. Methinks that  
Rome

May boast the gayest singers, lightest dancers  
In Italy. Here sit we quaffing wine  
On very pinnacle of mirth. Without,  
Some jocund rhymes salute the ears, and mingling  
With bells of mules and cries of trafficking.  
E'en lousy beggar grins in sun-warmed rags.

*2nd Noble.* The city swears by her proud self these days.  
And strangers swarming add their welcome coin.  
Most wisely ordered Pope the Jubilee.\*

\* *Vide* Account of Jubilee.

For day and night they rake gold treasures in ;  
These eyes have seen the priests with rakes in hand.  
And hundreds sleep in streets, content to lie  
Within our walls. Imperial Rome, I drink  
To thee.

*3rd Noble.* And I to thee, my pretty wench.

[*To Dancing-girl.*

*Dino.* Nay, let me share that cup. [*Kisses her.*

*1st Noble.* None such untouched

Pass thee.

*Dino.* For sake of my town's gallantry.

*3rd Noble.* Some of thy townsmen here are more  
austere.

*Dino.* I am a Florentine, but not a Dante.

*3rd Noble.* His embassy being o'er, why lingers he ?

*Dino.* As midwife marks the wrist of elder twin  
With silken skein, lest he lose heritage,  
So marks he well with sacred cord of Rome  
His patriotic zeal that twins it with  
His love of power. His embassies but mark  
The social ladder he'd in secret scale.

*3rd Noble.* And is fresh war his theme ?

*Dino.* Fresh trouble, surely.

When news to Florence came that Corso'd gained  
The Pontiff's ear, the Bianchi Dante sent  
To Rome, trusting his eloquence would win  
A counter promise from the Holy Father.

*2nd Noble.* But Charles has entered Florence.

*Dino.* Ay, the Pope  
Has helped him to it. And Donati's back.

One night his colleagues met him at the gates ;  
His fiery speech inflamed their smouldering zeal,  
And led by him they drove the Priors forth,  
Set prisoners free, and fired the town. Five days  
Ruled kings of riot ; then they council held,  
Made Gabrielli head, and Bianchi banished.  
Then Dante's palace burnt, and seized his lands.  
I stay in Rome to escape these riotings,  
Not loving wars and turbulence that mar  
Our pleasant pastimes, stunting crops and vintage.  
Security's round paunch beseems me more  
Than pale anxiety's lean shank.

1st Noble.

Lest we

Grow thin, let's banish care. Dance, wenches, dance !

[*The Girls dance to music.*]

*Enter DANTE.*

*Dante.* Still sipping pleasure's sweets. I'd thought  
the cup  
Was long since drainèd to the dregs by thee.

*Dino.* While palate, lips, and hands obey my will,  
Not weight of ninety years could take from me  
The joys that lurk in cup, in kiss, in dice.

*Dante.* No, fool ! our senses thrill us, but their  
pleasures  
Miscall not joys—for those are born of spirit.

1st Noble. We'll split no straws at our good feast to  
night.

Come, join our board and pocket scholars' "saws."

2nd Noble. Nay, rather use them. He's not over-wise



Who stands no jest, and he who scorns a joke,  
Eats all his life his puddings without spice.

[*All laugh and fill their cups.*

*Dino.* Good neighbour, why this zeal? Has Boniface  
Presented thee with some new code of morals?

[*All laugh again.*

*Dante.* O Rome! is this thy mission—to create  
St. Peter's Chair for knaves to desecrate?  
Where all the saints once crowned upon that seat?  
Dead—martyred by these vicious men who wrest  
The papal power from every hand that's clean.  
How long, how long, Jerusalem, shall sin  
Usurp thy purity?

*3rd Noble.* Hark, how he mutters.

Come, tell us, Dante, to what realm art flown?  
How deep are thy thoughts digging now for hell?

*Dante.* \* The hell I rhyme is here—this earth affords  
The stuff from which one can create all hells.

*3rd Noble.* Poor earth, the scape-goat of the preachers.

*Dante.*

Ay,

Thou'rt right; the fault's less in the world than men.  
Humanity creates the shadows drawn  
From beams of one celestial Sun. No shade  
Obscures an atom of His brightness, once  
The cloudy atmosphere of life be passed.

*2nd Noble.* Pray, pray descend from Mount Parnassus;  
loose

The reins of Pegasus, and drop into

\* Dante's "Epist."



Plain politician. What's the news from home?

*Dante.* Both foe and friend were better for my presence.

As when I hitherward turned face, I said,

"If here I sit, who stirs? If forth I go,

Who stays?" Would I could both be home and here.

*Dino.* Hast heard from Gemma, and sweet Beatrice?

*Dante* (*not heeding him*). Corrupt with all her beauty—  
foul though fair.

Where she might reign as queen, she'll weep as slave.

Through her own evils crushed to earth, and poisoned

By vice, the asp she clasps like Egypt's Queen.

*Dino.* Such words against thine own?

*Dante.*

Ay, mine she is,

Through bitter sins, still mine to love and weep for.

*Dino.* Such words almost disown thy child.

*Dante.*

My child?

Shall I be called one of her fathers? No;

Nor numbered with the city's patriarchs.

When young I deemed her mother of our race.

*Dino.* She, mother of our race? Thy Beatrice?

*Dante.* What means thy ill-timed jest? Why speak of  
one

Whose blessed name's too pure for thee to breathe,

Who crowns the pinnacle of heaped up griefs,

Beneath which faint soul swoons. The starry sorrow

Shining on shaded life with saintly ray,

Half blinding eyes of love upturned to her.

Ah! Bice!

*Dino.* Ser, what means thy criss-cross speech?

We bandy words like children tossing coins  
Whose golden worth's unknown. If thou art sane,  
Explain what devil prompts these bitter thoughts  
Against thy child?

*Dante.* Thy words are dark to me  
As dawn to sightless eyes. Speak! solve this riddle.

*Dino.* When I did call thy daughter fair, thou criest,  
"She's foul!"

*Dante.* 'Twas Florence, man. I spoke of Florence,  
Who holds within her walls degraded brutes,  
'Stead sober earnest men and sweet chaste maids.  
In secret many stab, rob, lust at will;  
But more, crime callous grown, flaunt out their sins  
In public highways, like foul loathsome lepers,  
Who lazy sit and count their hideous sores.

*Dino.* Hard words from townsman, prior, ambassador.  
Such hate should cancel all thy love for Florence.

*Dante.* Nor flood nor flame could cancel love like  
mine.

*Enter Page.*

*Page.* A messenger for noble Dante.

*1st Noble.*

Haste,

Admit him to our presence instantly.

*Dino (to a Noble).* Now watch the lion-skin till fox  
appears.

This messenger brings unexpected news.

I've waited three long days to see this sport.

*Enter Page with UBERTO.*

*Dante.* Is 't thou, dear boy? Glad welcome : and thy news?

*Uber.* (*giving letters*). Is good—this from my father—  
this from Gemma. [*DANTE opens letter.*]

*Dino.* Art come to see the sights, Uberto?

*Uber.* Nay ;

Dal Colle bade me hasten, time is pressing ;  
To-morrow I depart.

*Dino.* And knowest thou not

The import of these letters?

*Uber.* No, not I.

*Dino.* Great news. If what I shrewdly guess be true,  
There's news to lower his pride some pegs.

*Uber.* What ! harm

To him—our Dante? Shame !

*Dino.* O hush ! he'll hear thee.

*Uber.* To make me act the traitor's part to *him*—

*Dino* (*restraining him*). Stay—curb thy petulance.

*Uber.* A traitor thou,

And traitors all who would abate his power.

(*Crosses to DANTE*) Pause, Dante—pause before those  
seals be broken.

If aught lies there within to injure thee,  
I swear by Three Kings' sacred names, 'twas writ  
Unknown to me.

*Dante.* To injure me, Uberto?

Then in Dal Colle's words must be the sting.

[*Reads letter and springs up violently.*]

'Tis false, ye liars ! false as ye are—false !  
O friends ! mark ye what act of violence  
The Neri plot—what gross injustice do.  
'Tis not enough they rob me of my lands.  
They banish *me*, accuse me of—— O God !

[*Throws himself into chair by table, his head in his hands. Noblemen exclaim.*

*Uber.* (*agitated*). Now, Justice, break thy scales. Up,  
Dante, up !

But face thy foes, discomfit them with truth ;  
Return to Florence !

*Dante.* Return ? I'm banishèd.

Dost know the meaning of that same word—banished ?  
To live for ever out of sight and sound  
Of all we love ; to bear a felon's curse ;  
To tread all paths but one that leads to home ;  
To live and die unloved, misjudged, unblest.

*Dino* (*reading paper DANTE dropped*). Accused of theft  
of public funds.

*All.* Of theft ?

*Dante.* What matters how the blow falls when it comes ?  
All sharpened swords behead, though one from Rome  
And one from Syria date ; we die the same.  
Ay, theft, if so they will, and murder, arson,  
And rape and sacrilege, so I am banished—  
What matter it by what foul means 'tis done ?  
It may count later somewhat at the reckoning.

*Uber.* O Dante ! how this blow falls on us all !

*Dante.* To banish *me* ! The stones should cry out  
shame !



To banish *me* ! No, though my bones may lie  
In exile's grave, Florence is part of me  
And I of her, and linked our fame or shame.

*Dino.* The links, methinks, do gape a bit apart.

*Dante.* To kennel, cur ! There gnaw thy rotten bones.  
Leave *men* alone. (*He crosses stage slowly*) Though  
banished, still I'm Dante,  
Still poet, friend—still enemy, still man !

[*Exit.* UBERTO *following.*

SCENE III.—MARCO'S house.

*Franc.* (*looking from casement*). And still Brunini  
lingers, with one hand  
On horse's mane. O mount ! speed far from us !  
See how he leans towards Marco ! Serpent-like  
He coils his specious arguments about  
An honest heart—there's mischief in the air.

[*Turns from casement.*

Would he were gone, his presence here disturbs  
Our wedded peace. What plot is that rogue hatching ?  
Since Dante's banished Florence is rife with strife,  
And Dino Corso's tool now seeks, alas !  
To drag my husband into party feuds !

[*Takes child from cradle.*

Dear babe, lie still next mother's heart. Our lives  
Mean Marco's guard, our love shall be his shield.

(*Sings*) So sleep, sweet babe, upon my breast.  
Cain gathers his sticks in the moon,\*  
While the great red sun in the west  
Is sinking to slumber-land soon.  
St. Anthony upon the hill,  
Is tending still  
Wee pigs that squealing go to bed.  
Rest, curly head !  
Forgotten be all earthly woes  
While nightingale sings to the rose.  
Breathe soft and low,  
Hush, hush ! Do, do !

*Enter MARCO.*

*Franc.* Thy guest is gone ?

*Marco.* At last ! He lingered, full  
Of some late conquest made. A portly dame  
Kissing her lily hand to him—fie on it !  
He's vain enough to be a silly girl.

*Franc.* If heaven be reunion of our souls,  
God grant me, then, companionship of those  
I loved while living ; but, alas ! if spirits  
Must squeeze betwixt those uncongenial minds  
That jarred our earthly peace, so may the Lord  
Out of our future Paradise keep Dino !

*Marco.* Nay, what good lodges in that dwarfish soul  
May live in joy when lost the meaner man.

*Franc.* What good survives of his would be so small,

\* Old legend of the man in the moon.

So frail and small, our eyes need magnify  
To scan the misty outline of his spirit.

*Marco.* Thy wit o'erleaps the truth, for Dino may  
With monstrous soul meet our two trembling selves.

*Franc.* May—yes; he may come swooping down on us  
Like mountain upon mouse. I doubt that "may."  
What stuff creates the eternal part of man?  
What dare survive these little bags of bones,  
These shreds of flesh, save love and purity?  
For God is Love, and none but pure see Him.  
On what can vicious love of gaming feed,  
What satiate the crave for wine and women  
Within the gates of pearl? From Dino take  
The powers of every sense, and what remains?  
Mere scraps—a scrimp of mercy, touch of truth,  
A patch of charity, and shade of faith—  
Which atoms shadow forth but meagre soul  
For angels' sight to welcome, lost amid  
The hosts of saints and martyrs' well-grown souls.

*Marco.* Like mine and thine, we'll say.

*Franc.* Like thine, filled out  
And rounded to the full with truth and faith,  
With honour, courage, and sweet love for me.

*Marco.* Which is the crowning virtue of my life.  
Thou art the noblest part of me. Be souls  
Fat, lean, strong, weak, or what thou wilt, in heaven,  
My shadowy spirit there will be thy making.

*Franc.* Would I were better guide.

*Marco.* Thou'rt best for me.  
If women's minds were likened unto skies,

To which of all their phases art thou like ?  
A perfect blue, guiltless of faintest cloud ?  
Ne'er thine such faultless calm. That's found, perchance,  
In Turk's harem, where some soft heart may doze  
Mid scents and sweetmeats, on a rose-strewn couch,  
While silver fountains plash to tinkling lutes,  
Happy in mere existence like a child.  
Or such a cloistered soul, lost in a realm  
Of prayers and visions, wrapt in purer life,  
Forgetting life in holy calm near God.  
Nor art thou like to sullen winter sky,  
When snowflakes in their ashen flight blot out  
All blue, till heavens, like penitents, weep veiled.  
Such gloom may mark the atheist's life, not thine.  
Nor art thou yet like April's varied sky,  
Where cloud and shower with sunshine and fair blue  
Vie with each other for precedence. Nay,  
Such varying mood was Sappho's and the poet's ;  
But thou art like a glorious autumn eve,  
Thy sky o'erhead Godward, a deathless blue ;  
In west grey masses melting into gold,  
While crimson facings peep from parted cloud.  
Such sky betokens oft averted storm,  
With richer possibilities for morrow.  
Such hope and beauty live in natures like  
Thine own, strong in emotions, rich in faith,  
Where anger's thunder peals at times, yet sun  
Of love thy darkest clouds still gilds.

*Franc.*

And thou  
Spok'st of that sun as setting. O my Marco !



Thy jest sounds too prophetic.

*Marco.*

What, alarmed?

And at mere mouthful of soft phrases, spun  
By husband's fancy unto gentle sense  
Because he loved thee?

*Franc.*

And not only loved,  
But loves, and will love me. So by that love  
I do implore thee, go not now to Florence.

*Marco.* If Florence were a maid, and I most false,  
Thou couldst not speak of her more jealously.

*Franc.* I fear her tenfold more than cruellest wanton,  
For fairer flesh than mine might rob me of  
Thy presence for some days and nights, but Florence  
May take unto herself the sacrifice  
Of all thy years. O! if my love is dear  
To thee, if child of mine has tender claim,  
Then stay to-day with hearts who, after God,  
Worship but thee.

*Marco.*

Dear wife, I needs must go.

*Franc.* And wilt thou see unmoved these bitter tears?

*Marco.* If thou couldst turn thine eyes to flowing seas,  
Till from thy tears another flood arose,  
My hardened will, as ark, thy brine would ride.

*Franc.* O! for the test of thine oft-vaunted love!

*Marco.* The moment nears when I must hence. Dear  
wife,

Allay thy fears, and give me God-speed kiss.

*Franc.* My lips refuse their office.

*Marco.*

So, then, I go,

And kissless.

*Franc.* Marco, stay—forgive my haste !  
But sad anxiety near killeth me.

*Marco.* Once home to-night, I'll laugh thy fears away.

*Franc.* Would that to-night had come !

*Marco.* Cesca, farewell !  
My duty claims me first, then love.

*Franc.* But all  
Thy duty should be love——

*Marco.* Unloose thy hands !  
God keep thee safe, dear wife. [*Exit.*

*Franc.* Gone, gone ! O God !  
What is my little life to his ? Spare him !  
When traitors threaten, let Thy guardian hosts,  
Invisible to men, fast intervene,  
And stretch white wings between the deadliest blows.  
(*Kneeling before image of Virgin*) Sweet sinless Mother  
Mary, well thou knowest

The love I bear my babe, yet would I yield  
Its little soul to thee to save my Marco.  
O ! from thy throne remembering earthly pain  
And earthly joy, bear thou my passioned prayer  
Unto His presence, who Himself is Love !

SCENE IV.—*A house in Florence.* GEMMA and BEATRICE.

*Bice* (*reading*). And so the story ends, and all were  
happy.

*Gemma.* And so our story ends not, Bice.

*Bice.*

Mother,

When once again we gather round the board,  
And not a chair is vacant, then our story  
Will have its happy ending too.

*Gemma.*

Alas !

These tear-dimmed eyes will never see that day.  
Betrayed by Boniface, betrayed at home,  
Poor exiled Dante sadly wanders forth,  
While we sit still and weep his loss.

*Bice.*

The saints

Must hear our prayers, must send my father home.

*Gemma.* Ah ! "must" is said in youth ; we elders  
know

How changeless is the eternal "not" from heaven.  
Cling to thy hope, dear child, be that thy comfort.

*[Crosses to casement.]*

An evil aspect fills the air this noon.

Crowds come and go, and shouts I hear from far.

My child, go not without to church to-day.

*[Slowly leaves the room.]*

*Bice.* Such glorious sunshine close within my reach ;

Such heavy shadows close about me fall ;

Such joy and lightness in the scented air ;

Such numbing pain and weight within my heart.

For thy sake, mother, still I hope and smile,

But, oh, the longing to escape this town

That fills my soul ! I stretch out yearning arms

And cry, "Come, father, back ! or let me hence

To thee, to cheer thy exile with my love."

*[Seats herself near the casement]*

*Enter* UBERTO.

*Über.* Alone, Madonna Bice? May I share  
Thy solitude? What means this wistful glance?

*Bice.* Uberto, wilt grant me favour?

*Über.* Ay, 'tis thine  
Ere asked.

*Bice.* 'Tis a message to be safe delivered.

*Über.* Entrust it me. Though words to seal my doom,  
To pope or player, beggar or to king,  
They're said.

*Bice.* My message is to heaven.

*Über.* I'd die  
To take it; but, through sins, my soul might slip  
Into the shades of nether worlds instead  
Of mounting to supernal light above.

*Bice.* There is no need to bend thy life, but knee.  
When passing San Giovanne, enter there,  
And pour a prayer into the Eternal Ear  
That hears alike the infant's lisping hymn  
And sinner's sigh above the loud-toned praise  
Of satisfied, self-righteous Pharisee.  
To our Creator, Judge, and Saviour, pray,  
To recreate, judge, save in pity Florence,  
To pour His balm of mercy in our wounds  
Of civil discord, let the olive thrive  
'Stead blood-stained laurels. Pray, O! pray for strength  
To guide thee straight through all these troubled times;  
And then, Uberto, pray for me!

*Then*

Thy words,



Madonna Bice, fall upon my heart  
As seed in springtide from the sower's hand  
Falls on the furrowed ground ; from my heart's soil,  
Ploughed by thy moving virtues, shall spring up,  
A living crop of holy thoughts and deeds,  
Due to thy sowing.

*Bice.* O ! may the angels' hands  
Reap close thy crop for God's own harvesting.

*Uber.* I'll pray for Florence and for guilty self--  
That God's just wrath be turned to healing mercy ;  
But for thy own pure soul, Madonna, prayers  
Need but to rise as sweetest benedictions.

*Bice.* Do women need less help by prayer than man ?  
Are we less keen to hear the tempter's voice ?  
Have we no thorns to tread beneath our feet,  
Nor fiery paths to tread with unsinged garments ?

*Uber.* We men have more temptations than ye maids ;  
We're formed of coarser clay.

*Bice.* Yet are ye formed  
In God's own image. Must ye men, then, drag  
That sacred semblance down into the dust,  
Let likeness of a God lie in the mire ?  
Man should be chaste as woman : sin is sin ;  
Thy stronger nature should uplift thee from  
The swinish pleasures of an earthly sty,  
From sloth, and gluttony, lust, heated cups,  
And all the miraged joys of fallen minds.  
And if we women strive as virgin, wife,  
To humbly follow Mary's holy life,  
Thou hast a higher type as man in Christ,

To preach thee perfect love of purity.

*Uber.* If worldly men would think such thoughts as  
thine,

Living them out in simple daily deeds,  
Life's byways would smell sweet with blossoms dropt  
From heaven, 'stead reeking of ill-savoured weeds  
That sprout from hell. Though 'tis not meet for man  
To vaunt his merits to his lady's face,  
I needs must say our race was never prone  
To gross delight in sottish pleasuring.

*Bice.* I know thee pure, and call thee, therefore, friend.  
Thy fault is rather pride with all its vices.

*Uber.* Blue blood must needs run proudly through our  
veins.

*Bice.* And why? Thy birth, wealth, talents, all are gifts  
From God. As such they should be humbly held.  
Pride is a pond'rous mantle, which when worn \*  
Becomes a pall for tender thoughts and deeds ;  
Beneath its folds lie stifed still-born hopes.  
My soul in secret oft has likened thee  
To truest knight of brave King Arthur's court,  
Who steadfastly set his young life apart  
To seek the Holy Grail. Be thou like him,  
As humble and as pure, and let thy pride  
Live only in good deeds, so I in faith  
Can call thee e'er my true Sir Galahad.

*Uber.* Thine, didst thou say? Would I in truth were  
thine !

O Beatrice ! thou must know I love thee !

*Bice.* And thou wouldst call me wife ?

*Uber.* If thou wilt stoop  
From thine enthronèd saintliness to share  
The earthly bliss of wedlock with myself.  
Most wisely hast thou read my thoughts, sweet Sybil.

*Bice.* I need no skill in keen Cumæan craft  
To sift thy meaning from thy garnered thoughts.  
No honest man will say unto pure maid,  
"I love thee," save he wills his passion change  
Her life's fresh tints to richer, deeper dye,  
Her virgin will and freedom narrowing  
To fit a golden circlet, talisman  
That holds in trifling space sweet love enow  
To fill a world with heavenly joy and peace.

*Uber.* And shall my love not win response from thine?

*Bice.* No blush of shame dusks cheek to own my love,  
No passion pales my maiden hue to feel it.  
I love thee without thought of shame or passion.

*Uber.* Dear lips, oh, say those words of life again!

*Bice.* I love thee, but I ne'er can be thy wife.

*Uber.* O Bice! waft me not upon thy love  
To heaven, to dash me down to hell again.

*Bice.* Whose daughter wouldst thou wed?

*Uber.* Our poet Dante's,  
A gleaming light of this dark age.

*Bice.* And banished  
By thine own father.

*Uber.* Barren not my heart  
For others' sins. Pleads not thy love for me?

*Bice.* It pleads for Dante.

*Uber.* And in a fruitless woe

Wilt wear thy young life out, discard our love,  
Since Florence chooses to misjudge thy sire?

*Bice.* O cruel city! giving genius birth,  
Denying right to die within its walls!  
While Dante, exiled, homeless wandereth,  
No hand of mine can ever lie in thine,  
Nor heart beat joyously against thine own.  
If fates had willed my sire a happier lot,  
As I so love thee—I had been thy wife.

*Uber.* O! say not *had*! Give me some grain of hope.  
Though small as millet seed, hid in my heart,  
'Twill grow till it can fill love's granary.

*Bice.* If thou light love with hope, thy fuel's soon spent.  
I love thee freely, without hope or fear.  
Love as I love—no feud of family  
Can wrest from us the treasures of our souls.  
Havened above the stars at Mary's feet,  
There lies my love for thee eternally!

*Uber.* Madonna, still on earth may angels dwell;  
In thy fair body breathes the purest spirit  
That e'er forsook the bowers of Paradise  
To help weak human hearts. O! be to me  
My light through life, my holy guardian here!

*Bice.* My prayers, my thoughts, my heart and love are  
thine.

Alone my outward form, frail flesh and blood,  
Thou canst not own; but all that lives for aye  
Thou dost possess, and be thou worthy it.

*Uber.* I cannot thrust aside a heaven on earth  
For others' ills, nor, sighing, let thee pass,



A saintly shadow o'er my path, while life  
Hot leaping through my veins still lends a chance  
Of winning Beatrice for my bride.  
But if God holds thee from my longing arms,  
Then may thy influence still keep me thine,  
And worthy of thy love.

*Bice.*

To this, Amen.

*Enter GEMMA with her Sons.*

*Gemma.* The soldiers throng the streets. What stirs  
abroad?

*Uber.* Sedition breeds in every court. Again  
We Florentines rejoice in party feuds.

*Gemma.* What says Dal Colle to this turbulence?

*Uber.* Thy kinsman Corso urges still to fight ;  
My father follows blindly where he leads.

*Gemma.* But thou, Uberto, wilt not heed his words.

*Bice.* Nay, he's for peace.

*Uber.*

For peace, and Dante home.

*1st Boy.* Look, mother—look ! here comes Madonna  
Cesca.

*2nd Boy.* All wet, and O ! how white her face—see—  
see !

*Enter FRANCESCA.*

*Franc.* Woe, woe to Florence, and most woe to me !

*Gemma.* What new and monstrous evil must we hear ?  
Speak, Cesca !

*Uber.* Marco—sister, what of him ?

*Franc.* Against all warning he has thrust his head

Into the lion's jaws, and joined my father  
When Corso council held last night. These hours  
I've spent upon my knees in prayer for him.  
This morning urgent fears pressed me to Florence ;  
There found my father's doors close barred to me,  
Rude men around but jested at my tears,  
Till dazed I hasted here. What mean these measures ?

*Uber.* I dare not breathe my fears ! Last night the hall  
Was shut to me. Our father deems me boy,  
But I will prove him all my manhood now.  
Till I bring news of Marco, bide thou here. [*Exit.*

*Franc.* Not here, not anywhere can I abide  
While demon doubts turn my sad heart to hell.  
Till knowing Marco safe, my weary feet  
Must pace the stones of Florence, though they burn,  
Like heated ploughshares, flesh from off my bones.

*Gemma.* O Cesca !—patience !

*Franc.* Mine is gone with Marco,  
So I must after it. [*Exit hurriedly.*

*Gemma.* Alas ! poor wife,  
I fear her happiness is o'er.

*Bice.* Dear mother,  
These bitter days are not for wedlock meant,  
So let me live and die by thee a maid.

*Gemma.* If Heaven wills it, I would clasp thee close  
Unto my mother's heart till death us part.

## SCENE V.—DAL COLLE'S house.

*Dal Col.* O sin !—O sin ! conceived by fell temptation,  
And born of opportunity ; in vain  
I strive with thee. Seeming afar but shade  
Scarce worth the fighting ; near, a substance foul,  
Most deadly real ; a hydra-headed foe,  
A Protean horror that entwines around me  
Cold, callous coils, till strangled I must yield  
Its slave and victim, every sense its own ;  
While hotter grows the stifling air about,  
Hell's breath seems seething up beneath my feet,  
And spirit voice to echo, " Lost—lost—lost !"  
If he would join our cause, his gold were ours ;  
But Marco lingers on the threshold, thus  
Baffling our aims by his vile stubbornness.  
Since yester eve I hold him prisoner here—  
For what ? Why keep him ? That's the question—why ?  
Each hour but rouses Corso's wrath the more,  
Each hour but weakens my resolve to save.

*Enter CORSO with several of his party.*

*Corso.* Has morning light thy prisoner brought to  
terms ?

*Dal Col.* I waited thee to question him.

*Corso.*

Let's end

This farce ; for either he will say us " Yea,"  
And join our forces for the party's good ;  
Or else repeat his " Nay," and with it—falls.

*Dal Col.* Shall I forget how near his kinship, Corso?

*Corso.* A curse upon his kinship, if it block  
Our way to better things; so let him bleed—  
Each ruby drop a ducat represents;  
Better his blood than ours. Such traitor loosed  
Would hound whole hordes of Bianchi down on us.  
By one weak act of clemency, we'll see  
Our gold in stranger hands, our houses razed,  
And every threshold blocked by throat-cut corpse.

*Dal Col.* It is too late. He must be ours, or die.

[*He crosses to door and speaks to a Guard.*

*A follower.* Best strike before Dal Colle's passion cools.  
His valour might not last until the morn.

*Corso.* To-morrow we'll have other eggs to hatch.

[*DAL COLLE returns with MARCO guarded.*

*Dal Col.* One chance we offer thee. Swear faith to us.  
Swear to attack the Bianchi. Swear to keep  
Away from Florence, safe in exile—Dante.

*Marco.* As I loathe thee, I swear to loathe thine oaths,  
And to unswear them all while I've tongue left.

*Corso.* No jesting, man; 'twixt life and death thou  
standest.

Give us a "yea," thou'lt live—a "nay," thou'lt die!

*Marco.* Nay, though it meant for me a thousand deaths!

*Corso.* One death thou'lt find sufficient for thy years.

[*Attacks him.*

*Marco.* Traitors! Not one true man amidst you all?

*Corso.* As true as steel, when 'tis to slay our foes.

*Marco (near casement).* Help! if there's justice left in  
Florence, help!



*Corso (stabbing him).* Silence, thou whining dog!

*Marco.* Dal Colle! Help!

*Dal Col.* Ay—to thy death! [*Stabs him.*]

*Marco (falls).* O God! save my poor Cesca! [*Dies.*]

*Enter* UBERTO and DINO.

*Uber.* Where is my father? Marco called for help.

*Corso.* Here, help him if thou wilt, for there he lies.

*Uber.* Dead! Slain before thee, slain without a word!

*Dino.* A handsome corpse, if ye'd not mar its beauty.

*Uber.* Whose treachery is this? Ye cravens, speak,  
That I may swift avenge the dead!

*Dal Col.* Stay speech,  
Else iron hands may lock thee in a cell,  
Till solitude teach thee to mend thy words.

*Uber.* Can Heaven keep silent while such deeds are  
done?

I wonder roof and wall, like Samson's pillars,  
Fall not, to crush ye in your murderous pride.

*Enter* FRANCESCA.

*Dino.* Back, niece; this is no scene for thee. Away!

*Franc.* O! let me to my father. (*Rushes to DAL  
COLLE, and kneels to him.*) At thy feet,

In all my woman's helplessness, I fall,  
Still, still thy child, to plead as in the days  
When scarce my baby hands could reach thy knees;  
To plead for what to me is more than life—  
My husband. Give me Marco back! He's here.  
And though I know thy father

Still other hearts more hardened throng these halls.  
There is a very cruelty in the air,  
A subtle sense of guilt and passion round.  
Father, one word from thee will spare me pain ;  
Speak—where is Marco ?

[DAL COLLE *turns away. She gazes round and  
sees CORSO's cloak.*

There is blood upon thee.

O God ! if Marco's—

[*Rises, and discovers MARCO's body.*

O ! he's wounded. Help !

My Marco ! speak ! Where art thou hurt ? Look up !

I'm here—Francesca—come to tend on thee.

We'll home, and there I'll nurse thee well again.

[*She pauses, and begins to realize he is dead.*

No, no ; not that ! Speak to me—Marco, speak !

One word—one little word, my love, my life,

My Marco ! God ! here with him let me die !

[*Flings herself upon MARCO's body.*

END OF ACT II.

## ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Castle Porciano in Casentino. Night.**Enter GITA slowly with a light.**Gita.* Who knocks ?*Dino (outside).* A friend of Dante's. Let me to him.*Gita.* How can I tell who's friend or not. No—no.*Dino (outside).* Open ! 'Tis I, Dino Brunini, knocks ![*GITA slowly unbars door and admits DINO.*]*Dino.* The wild wind whistled loud outside. My cloak,

Though closely drawn, near parted from my back.

Where is thy master, witch ? Speak, lazy bones !

*Gita.* How should I know ?*Dino.* Old know-naught, stir thy stumps !*Gita.* The saints preserve us ! Is he mad or fool ?

Witch—lazy bones—know-naught—both mad and fool !

*Dino.* Thou dried-up mummy of thy youthful self,  
The Theban dead are fresh, compared to thee !

Tell Dante who is here—haste, scour-pot—haste !

*Gita.* Tell him—not I, fast flinger of foul words !

May all the ills of life befall thee ;

May murrain prey upon thy herds and flocks—  
Blight crops; temptations of St. Anthony  
Assail thy soul, and thou succumb to each;  
May death——

*Dante (having entered unobserved).* Cease brawling,

Gita! Get thee hence. [*Exit GITA, grumbling.*]

Thy message, Ser? What brings a stranger here?

*Dino.* Dante!

*Dante.* Thou, Dino?

*Dino.* Who comes to find thee  
Guarded like hell, with worse than Cerberus.  
A surly soul thy Gita.

*Dante.* Ay, but honest.  
And sourest tempers often make sweet cooks,  
Who spoon-meats well can spice, while wrinkled hands  
Can roll smooth paste.

*Dino.* All indigestion's ills  
Would wait upon my meals such hags did serve.  
My appetite needs youth and comeliness.  
I trust, Ser poet, welcome waits me here.

*Dante.* No; libertines and cowards suit me not.

*Dino.* Not when the liberty of libertine  
And coward's courage both recall thee home.

*Dante.* Read me thy riddle quick, and get thee gone.

*Dino.* 'Tis simply solved. Thy exile is at end.

*Dante.* I put no credence in such embassy.

*Dino.* All prejudice, good neighbour—prejudice!

*Dante.* Out with the motive of thy coming—haste!

*Dino.* Thou hast a daughter, Dante, young and fair.  
Hadst thought of wedding her?



*Dante.* I'd rather light  
Her fun'ral pyre than wedding torch.

*Dino.* But why?  
To youth Love dancing comes, all rosy crowned.

*Dante.* To some he tends his nectar's sparkling cup,  
To me he held but poison draught to drain.  
At times he speeds in golden sheen, a fay  
Strewing man's path all o'er with priceless gifts.  
Anon crawls to his heart like subtle snake,  
There fixing fangs, feeds to satiety.  
So love stole to my childish breast ; I was  
No infant Hercules to strangle it.

*Dino.* A plague to metaphor ! Thy daughter's grown  
The prettiest wench alive. To see her pass,  
With head erect and modest eyes cast down,  
On the way to church, invites a man to prayer.  
There is a breath of spring about the girl  
That rouses freshness in the dullest blood.  
Ay, Dante, by my troth, I'll wed her fairly.

*Dante.* What, thou !

*Dino.* Give her to me, I'll promise thee  
Free pardon, safe return to Florence.

*Dante.* Wretch !  
Wouldst have me barter my own flesh and blood ?  
Out of my sight, my reach, before these hands  
Strangle to silence thy vile lying breath ! [Seizes DINO.]

*Dino.* He's killing me ! Good Gita, help me !

*Dante* (throwing him off). Dog !

*Dino.* I'm mauled because I offer liberty ;  
I'm maimed because I offer hand and heart

To bright-eyed Bice.

*Dante.* Fool, soil not that name,  
But with this answer go. (*Unbolts door. UBERTO is on threshold.*) Yonder thy way.

*Dino.* One moment stay——

*Dante.* Ay, stay without these walls.

*Uber.* Let me lend helping hand. (*They put DINO outside and bolt door.*) Pound on, my friend,  
Dint iron bolt, drive deep the nails with knuckles.  
What, master ! not a word to welcome me ?

*Dante.* The stripling has at last, then, grown to man,  
The one sound branch upon the rotten tree  
Put forth its leaves. Most welcome ! for I hear  
Uberto's voice has still the old ring in it.

*Uber.* Uberto's heart has still the old love in it.

*Dante.* O exile, from the depths of Mara wells  
Some drops of sweetness mingle with thy gall !

*Uber.* Through all these fateful months since last we  
met,

How burns life's taper with the noble Dante ?

*Dante.* Now flickering high, then falling low, until  
But spark is left. Each morn brings waking wish  
For Florence stronger in my soul ; each night,  
This long suspense glooms spirit like a pall  
Hiding dead hopes.

*Uber.* Yet Florence brought thee pain.

*Dante.* Such pain as mothers bear in silence through  
Their babes, close mixed with rapture.

*Uber.* Yet 'tis pain  
That sorely chafes such souls as thine and Guido's.

*Dante.* The other eye of Florence, rightly named.  
It rent his heart that I so sent him forth,  
And though his generous soul at last forgave,  
His love reproached me to the end. For justice  
Had made me iron when I banished him ;  
Friendship unnerved me to a woman when  
We brought him home, alas ! to see him die.  
Oh, death has rudely treated me in stealing  
My loved ones hence before their time—and Marco,  
The last, most foully murdered.

*Uber.* And from that time  
My kinship with the Neri ceased to be,  
While our poor widowed Cesca refuge found  
With Guido's loved and mourning spouse. Alack !  
Long past her spring-tide through these deeds of blood !

*Dante.* La Primavera—how the name recalls  
Glad days of youth, when life shone like a sun  
Full hot upon me, gilding all my day,  
Till slowly Time turned it to waning moon  
Scarce lighting my black night.

*Uber.* Arouse thee, Dante !  
Awake from slumberous past, shake thy soul free  
From fancies dead. The Neri still plot on,  
While th' Emperor Henry comes to settle doubts,  
And turbulence to quell. The Iron Crown  
At Milan he received, and now but waits  
For fresh recruits. Turin and Asti gave  
Him loyal welcome ; should not Florence too ?

*Dante.* She must. Twice have our exiles failed to win  
A safe return. Now can they force th

\* And we in deserts dwelling shall behold  
\* Our glorious sun arise. Justice, obscured,  
\* Again in splendour shines ; all peaceful men  
Will welcome Henry as deliverer.  
But should he fail, and with him all our hopes,  
Then life becomes for me but empty shell,  
From which crab-like I've crawled to lose myself  
In ocean of the infinite beyond.

*Uber.* Though Florence lost, still earth has much to  
offer

To us who know thy worth. Thy life is draught  
Of precious wine to thirsty exiled lips.

*Dante.* Would they could drink it till they drained me  
dead !

*Uber.* Thy daughter Bice—goes her love for naught ?

*Dante.* She's half the world to me.

*Uber.* Thy poem—has it

No hold o'er thee ?

*Dante.* It has an iron grip.

*Uber.* Then let the iron grip and half the world  
Still fetter thee a while to earth.

*Dante.* Uberto,  
Thy friendship cheers my sinking soul ; thy words,  
Like mellow wine, warm veins. I needed such  
To drown ill-savoured flavour Dino left.  
The brute quite swallows up the man in him,  
And rather than see Bice in his arms,  
Virginius-like, I'd stab her to the heart !

*Uber.* Did the beast dare to dream of Bice ?

\* Dante's " Epist. "



*Dante.*  
He sought her hand.

Ay,

*Uber.* How dare he lift his eyes  
Unto so sweet a lady. Had I known,  
His hide had smartly paid for it. Still, Dante,  
In fairer days to come shall she not wed?

*Dante.* Another bridal is my theme—my country's.  
\* Console thyself, Italia, for thy spouse,  
\* Our century's joy, thy people's glory, comes;  
\* He hastens to thy nuptials—dry thy tears,  
\* O beautiful of the most beautiful!  
Weave wreaths and burnish gems, strew tender flowers  
Adown thy paths, bring forth the sealed wine,  
Spread sumptuous feast, shout out the bridal hymns,  
Hang up gay banners, light the wedding torch.  
He comes, imperial Henry comes as spouse!

[*Knocking heard at door.*]

*Uber.* Who's there? Our friends arrive! In God's  
name, enter!

[*Opens the door. Exiles, with torches lit, enter.*  
(*To DANTE*) The wedding torches lit—lead thou the  
guests!

*Dante.* Most welcome, friends! Again we need unite,  
Beneath imperial power; all fears we'll starve,  
And fatten hopes, and so we'll on to Florence.

*An Exile.* We come to claim thee as our advocate.  
Be thou our leader to the Emperor.

*Several.* Ay, ay, we want thee, Dante, for our guide.  
Then will we gladly bend obedient knee

\* Dante's "Epist."

To him who gives us back our homes and kin.

*Dante.* \* But act like freemen ; ne'er forget that he,

\* Though emperor, to us is minister ;

\* That he for you is made, not you for him.

We fight for justice, and that sacred name

Must keep us true unto ourselves. He comes

Our brave deliverer. All praise to him,

Due service his ; but he is not our God.

*Uber.* As freemen, swear ye all to fight for Florence ?

*All.* By the Three Kings, we swear't !

*Dante.*

Amen. Away !

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*Large hall in Ducal Palace at Verona.*

*Steps leading from Garden.* Courtiers. Ladies *crossing stage.* Pages *with hawks.*

*1st Page.* My hawk much faster flies than thine ; his  
eyes

Shine like the jewels in the ducal ring.

*2nd Page.* Mine faster flies, thou knowest it—mark  
this.

How strong his wing, how sharp his beak !

*1st Page.*

Like Dante's.

[*They laugh.*

*Jester.* Stealing my jokes ? Hatch thine own eggs,  
cuckoo !

\* Dante's "Epist."

*2nd Page.* Nay, not thy jokes ; they're stale as last year's fish.

Who cracks thy nuts of wit, finds dust within.

*Jester (rolling him over).* Then lick that dust, thou most rampageous urchin.

*Enter GIOTTO and UBERTO.*

*Giot.* How all this din of royal roystering  
Discordant falls upon our poet's ear.  
When first he haven found within these walls,  
\* Each wish was granted ere he asked—but now  
Can Grande treats him with less courtesy.  
This statesman skilled and soldier bold, doth stretch  
Domains throughout the north, and holds the trust  
Of vicar-general ; yet with friends he lays  
His rank aside and wastes whole days in pleasure.

*Uber.* Let's trust the prince will be in mood to-day  
To list to serious matter, urging Dante  
Accept the terms I bring. As friend of his,  
Good Giotto, speak for me.

*Giot.* Thy mind is mine  
Upon this subject.

*Jester (with low bow).* Ho ! high day to thee !  
Thou puissant father of fat ciphers, hail !

*Uber.* Keep forward tongue betwixt thy teeth, thou fool !

*Jester.* And here's another of his sons !

*Giot.* All lies !

\* "Paradiso," xvii.



*Jester.* All truths, proud painter. Didst not make thee  
great

With one round O? with cipher, zero, nought,  
Conceive it, fashion it, and bring it forth?  
Shall not posterity swear by thine O?

(*Singing*) Sing ho!  
Giotto's O,  
Brought fame  
To his name.

*Uber.* Arena's chapel and Assissi's church,  
Madonnas meek and Holy Children, will  
Keep Giotto's name alive some centuries.

*Giot.* May they keep Giotto's body too alive!  
We artists need to live like other folk.

*Jester.* We jesters need to live like other folk.  
If brush and chisel warm and feed thee, jokes  
My food and fuel. Place, then, for the fool!

*Enter CAN GRANDE DELLA SCARLA with attendants.*

*Giot.* Place for the prince! Now is thy time, Uberto.

*Uber.* Pray fortune's wheel play me no trick, and drag  
Me smiling 'neath her rim to leave me powder.

*Giot.* Then mount it, man! Grab spokes, be off on it!

*Uber.* (*advancing*). Most gracious prince—I——

*Jester* (*interrupting*). Ho! seize him as traitor!

*Can G.* As traitor—why?

*Jester.* No true man he, my liege.

*Giot.* For shame!

*Jester.* For truth, I'd rather cry, good Giotto.  
He's well equipped, not e'en a hole upon him,

No rag nor tatter from his crown to sole.

Yet, playing gallant, he's the 'beggar still.

*Uber.* That here I stand as beggar is a fact.  
This my petition—this I beg thee read.

[*Hands paper to PRINCE.*]

*Can G.* From Florence—touching Dante? Where is he?

*Jester.* In hell, or purgatory. (*All laugh.*) There he sups,  
And spends his nights too when the fit's upon him.

*Can G.* Tell Dante we await him. [*Exeunt Pages.*]

Now, thy news.

*Uber.* With Henry's death, the Bianchi's last hope  
waned.

The Neri, now in power secure, proclaim  
To exiles pardon, on conditions slight.

*Can G.* Will Dante's haughty spirit brook these  
measures?

His pride will ne'er wear out till torn by death.

*Jester.* Why's death more philosophical than Dante?

*Can G.* Say on.

*Jester.* He sings of heaven and hell, while death  
Sends thee to one or t'other.

*Can G.* Thou art starving,  
So lean thy wit. Go—get thee dinner, fool!

*Jester.* Shall I, then, feed on Dante's pile of bones? \*

*Can G.* Beware! thou'lt breed contention from these  
bones.

*Jester.* I'd rather pick a bone than quarrel with thee.  
Crowned fools are ever enemies to dread.

\* *Vide Appendix.*

*Enter DANTE.*

*Can G.* Ah, Dante, news—and news for thee from  
Florence.

She offers thee the freedom of her gates,

Recalling exiles. Read, and prove my words—

[*Gives papers to DANTE.*]

There's trivial fine to pay with sundry penance.

*Dante.* To pay one copper's value of this fine  
Would mean the worth of conscience. Fined? For what?  
Through weary years of exile, clean I've kept  
Mine honour. Ye who brought this message—go,  
Tell knaves who sent thee here that not till Florence  
Wide opens gates to me with loyal welcome  
(Acknowledging this gross injustice done),  
Within her walls will she behold me more.

*Can G.* Bethink thee twice before thou dost refuse.

*Dante.* To end my exile with disgraceful act—  
With penance, fine ; 'mid pardoned convicts stand  
On St. John's festival within the church,  
The penitential candle in my hand ;  
Have rites and gifts restore my townsmanship !  
\* Three lustres of sad exile borne, should I—  
\* I, Dante Allighieri, so return ?  
\* Does innocence deserve crime's punishment ?  
\* Shall I, housemate of pure philosophy,  
\* Be offered up like idle schoolboy bound ?  
Here is mine answer. [*Tears papers and scatters them.*]  
*Über.* So die all our hopes.

\* Dante's "Epist."

*Dante.* Thou on this embassy?

*Giot.* And I, too, urging

Thy coming home. Let Florence be unjust,  
So thou but tread her streets again. Time proves  
Defender. We, thy friends, demand thy presence.

*Dante.* Do ye demand such dire disgrace as well?

\* The beauteous Florence, Rome's fair daughter, still  
\* Rejects me from her breast where I was born ;  
\* And where, if pleasing her, I fain would end  
\* The days which yet are mine, and at the last  
\* Rest there my worn out spirit. Weary wanderer,  
\* Well-nigh a beggar, through most parts where one  
\* Melodious tongue is heard, have I now roamed  
\* Against my will, and wounds of fortune known.  
\* By blasting breath of poverty fast driven  
\* To diverse ports—a bark *sans* sails, *sans* rudder.

*Uber.* With an unchanging "no" must I depart?

*Dante.* Unchanging ; everlasting as the snows  
Crowning the glacial fronts of Alpine range.

*Uber.* I'd shed my blood to draw a "yea" from thee ;  
But 'tis embedded in an iron will  
That neither heat nor force of love could weld.

*Can G.* Here has my fool been plucking at my sleeve.  
Speak out thy message unto Florence, man.

*Jester.* Tell her, though Dante gives in name, in nature  
Forgiving he is not ; and though enduring  
Through fontal vows, through exile he is—never.†

[*All laugh.*]

\* Dante's "Epist."

† *Dante*, "giving ;" *Durante*, "enduring."

*Can G.* My wonder is such fool can win th' applause  
Of all my court, while thou, so wise, dost fail.

*Dante.* Thy wonder dies, didst thou but know this  
truth—

Similitude of tastes gives friendship birth.\*

*Can G.* Keep to thy poet's province; thou'rt not  
worth

Thy salt as jester. [Retires up stage with Courtiers.

*Giot.* Were't not best to stifle

This evil blood betwixt ye?

*Dante.* Let it out!

Ill-humours pent will poison healthiest mind.

*Uber.* Has thy old hate for Corso waked or slumbered?

*Dante.* How fares he?

*Uber.* Dead—near Villa Ravezzano,  
O'erpowered by Catalans on horse, who stabbed  
Him through the throat. To abbey of San Salvi  
Monks bore his bleeding corpse, and on the morn  
With scanty honours buried him.†

*Dante.* So ends

A life most turbulent. He was too bold,  
Too worldly-wise; his vast ambition caused  
His country an infinity of broils.  
Still, Church forgives, ignores the cloudy past,  
When with rude hands his sister once he tore  
From cloister's sacred shelter, forcing her  
Back home to wed.‡

*Giot.* Some sisters would thank him

\* Petrarch relates this incident.

† Villani.

‡ Vide Appendix.



Who found them husbands.

*Über.*

Now, Dante, for thy news.

*Dante.* Through our loved land I, wandering, passed  
to France,

And sought in Paris stimulus to gain.

Sitting on straw and drinking learning in,

I heard bold lectures from the sage Sigier ;

Or, rambling near the Seine, marked the sad house

Where Abelard fair Héloïse once taught

Latin and love together—beginning life

More man than monk, to end more monk than man ;

While she a cloistered lifetime spent, to rue

A few wild days of passionate love and youth.

Then sailed to white-cliffed isle where Edward reigns,

Son of the Longshanks of adventurous fame.

Tarried in London by the lordly Thames,

Touched Oxford's hallowed ground, where once of yore

Great Alfred wisely lit a little spark

To fire some centuries of learning. Saw

The state of University's great Hall,

Which Will of Durham well endowed, and Baliol,

Which Scotch king's father founded. Saw the house

Where dwelt the Merton scholars, which the wise

Walter de Merton once from Malden moved

To Oxford. Viewed fair lands and strong hewn castles,

The gentle hills, deep dales, and yielding soil,

The strong limbed race that fills this teeming isle,

And marked the blue waves beating watch and ward

Around this sturdier Venus of the sea.

Retraced my steps, with longings infinite,

To find my Florence still *porte close* to me.

\* My people, O ! what have I done to thee,

\* That thus in exile I must weep my days ?

*Giot.* The offender's oft more bitter o'er the past  
Than he who suffered through th' offence ; thy heart  
Forgives ere Florence will.

*Uber.* But now she strives  
To win thee back into her keeping.

*Giot.* Friend,  
Unbend thy dignity—accept these terms.

*Can G. (returning).* Still obdurate, wise Dante ?

*Giot.* The firmness which  
I reproduced in Dante's youthful face  
Wanes not ; the strong will strengthens. I read " No "  
In every line and wrinkle on his brow.

*Uber.* And with this " no " I bid thee, Prince, fare-  
well ;

Sweet Bice's waiting eyes will soon brim o'er  
At my sad news.

*Dante.* Tell her to love her father  
As he loves her ; though exiled, he is true—  
And better that than pardoned be and false.

*Can G.* My greetings to all friends, and take God-  
speed. [*Exit* UBERTO.]

Now for our pastimes. Come, come—join us, Dante.

*Dante.* Anon, Can Grande. [*He follows* UBERTO.]

*Can G.* We'll not bide his pleasure,  
So, friends, proceed.

*Jester.* Let's trip the jaunty measure,

\* Dante's " Epist."



Let's crack the walls with our wild jests and laughter,  
In youth let's lusty be, and buried after !  
    So hang up the lance,  
    Live song and dance,  
And love, love, love till the crack of doom O !

SCENE III.—*A wood near Ravenna. Convent on one side ; vespers are being sung. The sun is setting behind the pines.*

*Enter FRANCESCA and BICE.*

*Franc.* Beneath these sombre pines here rest ; thy limbs  
Are not for travel. Every day I mark thee,  
See thy slow step. We haply near our goal.

*Bice.* Though thrice as weary, though before me rose  
Range upon range of purple hills beyond,  
That must be scaled ere Dante could be reached ;  
Though every step left crimson stain behind,  
I'd gladly on, still dreaming of one face,  
Forgetting toil, all else but duteous love.

*Franc.* O fools, we women ! thus to give our lives—  
Our souls need be—to waste upon a man.

*Bice.* My life I'd gladly give for one good man,  
When he to me bears the dear name of father.

*Franc.* E'en if a brute that father ? I have none ;  
I am unfathered by grim deeds of blood,  
Unsexed by treason, treachery, and lies.  
No more a woman now, I'm but revenge !

*Bice.* O pardon, Heaven, her wandering words; her lips,  
Like lyre unstrung, give forth but dissonance,  
Till joy retunes them to heart harmonies.

*Franc.* The harmonies of hell are in my heart.

*Bice.* Hush! hush! the angels sing.

[*Singing heard from convent.*

*Franc.*

Angels of darkness.

[*She wanders round to see the convent, and returns  
to find BICE fainted.*

Let's try if these celestials, mortals help;  
If praying hands can ope as well as throats.  
Poor Bice! all her strength has fled. Here! help!  
(*Goes to convent door*) If Christian souls ye be.  
(*After a moment two Sisters appear.*) Here lies a maid  
Far spent—haste to her rescue.

*Sister.*

Whence come ye?

*Franc.* From Florence; and we seek the exile Dante.

*Sister.* Not far, then, need ye go. Ravenna lies  
Behind the wood, and there he bides. To-night  
We'll shelter ye, and on the morrow point  
The pathway to the town.

*Franc.*

Our thanks and prayers

Are thine for this. Courage, sweet Bice—come!

[*Exeunt. It grows darker; then the moon rises.*

*After a pause, enter DANTE slowly, from the right.*

*Dante.* Most bitter are the tears that dew the bread  
Of beggary, spoiling each savoury dish  
That's doled in charity, arousing thirst  
For satiate waters of sweet liberty.

O! had I Midas' touch to turn these trees  
To glistening gold, I'd hew them limb from limb,  
And send them swift into the niggard hands  
That ope so slowly to remove my wants;  
They'd clasp these fast and firm, flinging as fuel  
The golden boughs upon their household hearths,  
Feeding their fire of wanton luxuries  
With my hard gilded thanks. Down, down, thou dream,  
To thy dominion shared with silent sleep.  
What am I now, to prate of gold? A stone  
That reckless rolls adown the hill of life—  
A feather tossed on winds of charity—  
A broken straw, scarce crediting the truth  
That once its stalk upheld rich golden grain,  
And proudly planted root in native soil.  
Gaunt-visaged poverty, dull-eyed, lean-limbed,  
With shrivelled skin o'erlapping sunken paunch,  
And staring ribs like ridges in ploughed fields—  
Thou fearful spectre, shadowing my steps,  
Where shall I turn to flee thy dread embrace?  
The labouring hind, who delves his plot of earth,  
Scarce heeds the spectral shade o'er threshold thrown,  
Save when crops fail, or sickness steals his hoard  
Of hard-earned ducats, and at throat he feels  
The tight'ning grip of Want's cold hand, and wakes,  
Dreading the dawn will bring this ghost his guest.  
But foes familiar seem at length half friends;  
Old griefs in some lives grow to daily needs.  
Mixed with his crop of fears, a tender hope  
Buds slowly with a promise of fresh joys,

And whispers Fortune's smile may sun him out  
Of humble home into a larger sphere—  
But has no pangs for proud prosperity  
He once enjoyed ; he neither feels nor knows  
The anguish of regret o'er glory gone.  
Eating my vitals, like the Spartan fox,  
My glutton grief still clamours for fresh food !  
Come closer, shades, conceived by fantasy,  
Of darkness born ! That I might find ye, spectres,  
I wandered forth from lighted hall, and sought  
The black Nun Night, telling her beads the stars ;  
Knowing ye lurked within her dusky folds.  
Come closer, shades ! What ! do ye flee my touch ?  
Has woe not purified my flesh enow ?  
Must my poor soul still sighing sit within  
An adamantine prison of the flesh ?  
Has it not even reached an outer door  
Where through some blessed chink it spies beyond  
Its kin at rest, care freed in sweet Elysium ?

*Enter FRANCESCA and BICE from convent.*

*Bice.* My father !

*Dante.* O ! answer, spirit form of her  
So loved ; the moonlight silver crowns thy head,  
The shadows of the pines enfold thy form ;  
Nearer, yet nearer to my side, and speak !

*Bice.* Dear father !

*Dante.* Beatrice, O my daughter !

*Franc.* Ay, take her to thy heart ; that is her haven.  
We fled fair-fated Florence ; she for love,

And I for hate. She seeks a father's love,  
I to revenge a father's deadly hate.

*Dante.* Tempting the untried terrors of the road,  
What force of love moved thee to seek my face  
Which failed to bring my wife unto my side?

*Bice.* Nay, father, blame her not. Youth's energies  
Oft venture where age wisely hesitates.

*Dante.* She thinks me mad for being but honest—fool  
For being but wise, and hates what I most love.

*Bice.* Not so, since thou lov'st me.

*Dante.* Ay, child, but she  
Ne'er understood my bent, would cross my moods.

*Bice.* And thou her's, father.

*Dante.* Glad if my great work  
Rot in oblivion.

*Bice.* Nay, nay, dear father.  
The treasures of thy thought were priceless gems  
To her. When strange hands rifled household gods,  
Thy tablets first she saved. Yonder, within  
Those sacred walls, they lie in wallet packed.  
So let Boccaccio Adimari gloat  
O'er blackened ruins of our loved palaces,  
And lord it grimly o'er our lands, while free  
Beyond the traitor's grasp thy kingdom thrives.  
Dear king, resume thy sovereignty.

*Dante.* O! pardon  
My lack of faith. To Gemma owe I much ;  
To thee likewise, Francesca.

*Franc.* Nay, no thanks  
Claim I. Not love, but hatred movèd me.



UBERTO *crosses slowly from pine-wood.*

*Dante.* Who dogs our steps in darkness? Speak, or die!

*Uber.* One who would fain both speak and die for  
Dante.

*Bice.* Uberto!

*Franc.* What brings him?

*Uber.* I followed thee,  
Shadowed thy wanderings, lest harm befall  
Two lonely pilgrims. Now thy Mecca's reached,  
Farewell!

*Dante.* This knightly deed still serves to deepen  
My debt to thee, effacing hate of thine.

*Franc.* But not a jot of mine. Not if my father  
Lay cold there at my feet, like Marco, murdered.

*Uber.* Rest sated with thy thought of vengeance done.  
Some trivial quarrel raised a comrade's knife;  
One groan—before me lay Dal Colle, dead!  
Beside the bleeding corpse I knelt and prayed;  
Forgotten all his sins—he was our father.

*Franc.* He dead! with all his guilt upon him, murdered!

Alas! no moment spared of life for prayer!

*Bice.* Come to the chapel. While we've breath we'll  
ask

For his forgiveness. Come!

*Dante.* Poor soul! is this  
The joyous Cesca?

*Franc.* Dante, think of it—  
Thou wert his friend—my Marco, cruelly butchered!



My sweet babe slain by Corso's fiends ! O God !

[*Leans against tree, sobbing. BICE comes to her.*

*Dante.* Better such death, with quiet of the grave,  
Than exile's weary wanderings from home.

The story of thy tragedy outstript

The actors. Well, I know thy woes ; they're mine,  
For Marco was my friend, true e'en to death.

Curst be the hands that smote him—curst the eyes  
That watched the deed unchecked ! If Ghibelline  
I grow, 'tis deeds like this that turn me one.

Thy grief is great, but greater might be borne.

Courage and patience—thou shalt be revenged.

*Franc.* Alas ! can vengeance give me back my dead ?

*Bice.* Hark ! how the chanting nuns rebuke thy  
speech—

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat,

He hath exalted them of low degree."

"Mine is the vengeance," saith the Lord. Shall we  
Usurp his province, and turn Nemesis ?

*Franc.* Alas ! poor father !

*Dante.* Still had he virtues, though

His mind, like rough-hewn, massive masonry

That stoutly stands, though loosely put together,

Gave room for minor vices to creep in

'Twixt nobler impulses, as scorpions scout

Around the stones in uncemented wall.

*Bice.* The chapel calls. Come ! Till to-morrow,  
father.

[*BICE embraces DANTE, and with FRANCESCA  
enters convent.*

*Dante.* To-day we weep the lost ; to-morrow men  
Forget we lived. Peace to our ashes, then.  
The vast tribunal of uncounted dead  
Dusts dancing feet of wantons, or may whiten  
Some few fanatics' knees ; but fresh, full life  
Makes present men forget all trace of past.  
My name may live——

*Uber.* For ever, Dante !

*Dante.* Ay,  
Perchance as poet, that one reads in shade,  
To carefully replace on silent shelf  
For moths to flirt with, dust caress. As man  
With heart to bleed, who'll stay to think of me ?  
A shade mid shadows are we at our best ;  
Living or dead, but shadows in the sun ! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.—DANTE'S *house at Ravenna.* GIOTTO.  
JACOPO. PIETRO.

*Giot.* Would I could veil to-day this startling truth,  
But still it stares me naked in the face.

*Jaco.* My father seems to fail through lack of spirit.  
This ending of Venician embassy  
Much chafed him. Guido haply thought to win  
Ally thereby, and check to put on Guelphs,  
Whose growing power he fears, though his their party.  
But, dreading papal wrath, Venezia spurned  
The embassy, refused to see my father.  
This galled his haughty soul. In vain our host

Flings free his favours in our midst—in vain  
Uplifts Pietro and myself. Alas !  
Ravenna's ruler fails t' assuage the pain  
That gnaws at Dante's heart.

*Piet.* Not e'en his work  
So wondrously completed comforts him.

*Giot.* Did not Giovanni del Virgilio urge  
That Dante wear Bologna's poet's crown ?

*Jaco.* Ay ; e'en this offer roused him not ; he sent  
This answer, " Though Bologna's crown might prove  
A glorious triumph to a poet's heart,  
'Twas Florence that should tend him laurel wreath."

*Giot.* When can I see him ?

*Piet.* Now, for here he comes.

*Enter DANTE, BICE, FRANCESCA, and a Priest.*

*Giot.* And so our poet scorns Bologna's crown ?

*Dante.* \* When newer kingdoms in my cantos live,  
\* And denizens of starry spheres appear,  
\* Then be the time to garland these grey hairs  
\* With laurel and with ivy.

*Giot.* Thou'rt pale, Dante.  
These early autumn breezes blow thee harm.

*Dante.* The fault's not in the winds, but me ; strength  
fails.

This golden month has no more golden mean.  
So round the whirling wheels of Fate's proud car,  
Levelling out lives like daisies trodden down  
Neath charger's hoof—philosophy 'lone mounts

\* Dante's "Epist."

To driver's seat, but drops the reins in haste  
When death cries "Halt!" Ay, all obey that voice,  
Whose tones still echo throughout Nature's gamut.  
The proudest pine decays, and drops to dust  
As lowliest weed; the fairest flow'r must fade,  
Cease blithest song, and tire the strongest wing.  
Yet from these ends arise still fresher lives:  
Spring's teeming soil demands last autumn's dead.  
So Nature turns her shrouds to swaddling-bands,  
And lets the spirit of her being revive  
In newer songs, and sweeter sights and scents,  
Bearing them thus throughout Eternity.  
And so man dies—his dust feeds future flowers,  
While golden thoughts and glowing words and deeds,  
Like tapers priests have blest around a tomb,  
Illume his grave, and shed a radiance o'er  
His name's short day, serving to light the path  
Of those close following. Man dies to live.  
O! death from life! O! life from death—the Mind  
Of minds alone this mystery comprehends.

*Piet. (to GIOTTO).* So talks he to himself from hour  
to hour.

*Dante.* Dawns grow to morns, and they to noons, and  
dusks

To dawns again; while creeping centuries  
Mark slowly time upon eternal dial,  
That lasts till sets the Sun of Righteousness;  
While good and ill, joy, grief, divide the honours,  
As hosts at life's spread feast, and we poor guests  
Still vainly scramble for the higher seats.

See, virtue shrinking from the lawless gaze,  
And hiding in pure hearts her simple charms ;  
See sin, the shameless scoffer, smiling stand  
In life's lane, stretching out enticing arms  
To youth and age : but woe to those who feel  
Her fatal breath upon their burning cheeks ;  
Better for them the deadliest fires' embrace,  
Bones bared of flesh, than soul of purity.  
As sick men preach to friends in vig'rous health  
That draughts and damps bring aches and fevered beds,  
Knowing they venture naught but tested truths,  
Yet see their wise words fall on heedless ears ;  
So I, who, soul bereft of cleansing love,  
Sought solace once in sins, and foully charred  
My younger self with unchecked fiery passions,  
Would warn men from the wiles of sorceress,  
Meeting with same success as sick man's sermons.

*Giot.* This sick man's sermons we'll most gladly hear.  
But tell me, Dante, how to serve thee best ?

*Dante.* Fling wide the casement, let the sunshine in,  
Until the last rays fade to sombre night.  
So sets my sun—so nears my night ; and then  
The end will come. Death's pall close covers now  
Our schemes, ambitions, passions, prides, hates, joys.  
In deep-dug grave they sink to nothingness.  
So shovel on the Lethæan earth—on all  
Save love—for that's entwined around our souls,  
And wings our wistful spirits unto heaven.

*Bice (gives cup).* Taste this, dear father ; it will give  
thee strength.



*Dante.* Ay, strength to meet the last of all our foes.  
He never fails his tryst to keep, well knowing  
In every struggle he still wins the day.  
But One alone hath striv'n to victory,  
The blessèd Master conquered death for aye.  
Why weeping, Cesca? Hush! our lady listens;  
I see her standing in the evening light,  
Saint, halo-crowned. O! Beatrice—speak!

*Bice.* I'm here, dear father.

*Franco.* Nay, not thee he means;  
He thinks of her.

*Dante.* Madonna, at thy feet  
I lay my love. O! glean it to thee close;  
Within thy bosom let it lightly lie,  
Like scented flower, a moment next thy heart;  
Or tread it low beneath thy heel like dust.  
'Tis all thine own to prize or scorn, sweet Bice.  
Didst thou not pray me to shun pride? Alas!  
This pride has proved the thorn in flesh through life.  
O Beatrice! silent still, blest one?  
Thou pointest to the bleeding Christ on cross,  
The patient, waiting Christ who calls on us,  
Though our weak hearts like angry crowd cry out,  
"O! crucify Him, crucify the good;  
We want Barabbas—want our evil deeds!"  
(*After a pause*) Weep not, Francesca; thou shalt follow  
soon

To find thy Marco, babe, awaiting thee.  
But thou, my child, look up into mine eyes,  
And tell me while on earth thou'lt shelter seek



Within the cloister's walls. There, safe from harm,  
Thy spirit pure can spend itself in prayers.  
What should my lily do amid the world  
But soil its whiteness 'gainst the common mud?  
What kinship hast thy sweetest soul with man,  
Who interweaves life's web with passionate love?  
His coarse embrace would kill thee. Keep thy heart  
Fit temple for the Lord to shrine Himself.  
Be thou wise virgin, with thy lamp of grace  
Well filled and trimmed to greet the Bridegroom's  
coming.

*Bice.* I'm here to do thy bidding, father—speak!

*Dante.* Within a twelvemonth from my death, bid world  
Farewell, and take the veil.

*Bice.*

Before high heaven

I vow it thee.

*Dante (drawing her into his arms).* My comfort through  
drear exile,

My joy and hope, in death thou givest me pleasure.

*Piet. (to Priest).* Art sure his hours are told?

*Priest.*

I shrived him now,

Expecting soon release. The sands of life

Run low; mark pallor spreading o'er his face.

*Jaco.* And knows he death is nigh?

*Priest.*

He knows the truth.

*Piet. (approaching DANTE).* Father, we bring thee news.

*Dante.*

I too have news.

*Piet.* An embassy from Florence seeks thee.

*Dante.*

Ay,

An embassy from heaven awaits my soul.

*Jaco.* Old friends of thine an audience ask.

*Dante.* They're welcome.

*Priest.* Nay, nay; bethink thee now how short the  
time

Ere thou be called before th' almighty Judge.

Strive not to mingle earthly feeling with

Thy thoughts of heaven.

*Dante.* As all life long I strove

To mingle God with daily act, why shrink

The last act of my life to share with God?

Admit my friends.

[*JACOPO admits GUIDO NOVELLO, UBERTO, and  
others.*

*Guido.* We come to ask how fares

Our Dante.

*Dante.* Well, since loosed the silver cords,

And broken golden bowl. Now shall the dust

Return to dust, the spirit to our God.

*Guido.* Our days are in His hands. We'll pray He  
spare

Thy life to us for still some length of years.

[*Converses apart with DANTE and his sons.*

*Uber.* Has love, the plummet line of woman's heart,

Not sounded thine? has patient faith no claim?

Must I still serve and serve without a hope?

*Bice.* O hush! Can love stretch wings while round  
us fall

Mysterious shadows from the angel Death?

*Uber.* Uniting life and death, Love is the link  
That forms the Trinity. Creator, Life;

The Saviour, Love ; last, Death, the Holy Spirit,  
Whose blessèd wings waft to Eternity.  
Love, like the faithful widow's cruse of oil,  
But spends its richness to renew its store,  
Increasing power of giving by the gift.  
From all the wealth of love stored in thy heart,  
O ! Beatrice, hast thou none for me ?

*Bice.* Why should my lips repeat the oft-told tale ?  
My love is thine ; but all my life's my father's.

*Uber.* If God now steal thy father from thy side,  
Then give me right to shelter thee—reward  
My constancy. Dante will bless our loves.

*Bice.* It cannot be. He wills I take the veil.

*Uber.* Plead to him on thy knees ; I'll join thee there.  
Let him but know that all our happiness  
Is bound up in each other's being, his love  
Will ne'er deny our suit.

*Bice.* After my God,  
I owe him life ; and if it pleases him,  
My duty's clear. Uberto, 'tis too late.  
Before high heaven I vowed to do his hest.

*Uber.* Such oaths bind not. Haste to him and un-  
say it.

*Priest.* My son, a vow once registered in heaven  
By Christians must be kept inviolate.

*Uber.* Not if our consciences cry shame upon it.  
O ! sister, plead for me.

*Franc.* If all thy love  
Moves not her will, she'll scarcely heed my prayer.  
Dear Bice, do not turn away ; my woes

Should weigh with thee, and his great faithfulness.  
Men dare not boast the steadfastness of women ;  
They love through passion where we love through love ;  
And when thou findest one whose manly strength  
But serves to keep his senses down, O ! honour  
That man to length and breadth of all thy life.  
Such one was Marco. I would undergo  
Ten lives as sad as mine, if with each came  
Those dear sweet days again we spent together.  
And such a one, upon my soul, I think  
Uberto is. And, knowing love's pure joy,  
I tell thee take such gift as sent from God.

*Priest.* Long Dante wished his child to take the veil ;  
And as his wish is unto her a law,  
And she did promise of her own free will,  
Refrain from urging her forswear herself.

*Uber.* But listen to the counsels of thy heart.

*Dante.* Uberto—come. (*UBERTO crosses to DANTE.*)

Most men have played me false ;  
Some of thy kindred proved mine enemies,  
But thou wert ever true. To thee I trust  
My last farewell. Tell Gemma to forgive  
If my heart, sorrow-rent, gave her no joy.  
I owed her children, home, and my full debt  
But poorly paid. Though honouring her as wife,  
She missed the crown supreme of woman's life.  
No kiss of passion sealed our wedding bond.  
My gratitude is hers ; so tell her this.  
And to false Florence say my latest breath  
Declares death has no sting, no torment hell

Keener than earth's injustice, since to live  
Misunderstood, condemned by those we love,  
Is death and hell together.

*Über.* Why, then, justice  
Thou'lt grant to me.

*Dante.* And dost thou need it?

*Über.* Bice  
And I both crave it.

*Bice.* No, not I, dear father.  
I know thy wishes must be just.

*Dante.* Speak, dear one.  
Art troubled, child? I would not see thee sorry,  
If thought or word of mine can make thee glad.

*Über.* O! my Beatrice, speak!

*Dante.* Speak, Beatrice! [*Pauses.*  
Stretch out thy holy hands and help me to thee!  
Air—air—give me but air! (*Sinks back in chair.*) How  
dark it grows!

Not as destroyer come, O death, but gently  
Shut out from strained lids this world's harsh views,  
Seal up the jarrèd ear from earth's rude sounds,  
Stay grief's grim accents on the faltering lips,  
Steal pain from touch, take tired exile home,  
O! thou great herald of eternal rest.

*Bice.* O father! father!

*Dante (half rising).* God—my heart is thine.  
And Florence—Beatrice— [*Dies.*

## APPENDIX.



“ Can proud Donati, Vieri’s words forget  
Said at the feast ? ”

*(Act I. sc. iii.)*

At a feast, Vieri dei Cerchi, observing two ladies exchange unfriendly looks, laughingly said, “ As these two dames do not agree, it will be best to put some friendly soul between them.” Dona Donati instantly sprang up, pale with rage, and was leaving the table, when Vieri rose, begged her pardon, and prayed she would be seated, laying his hand upon her sleeve as he spoke. But the angry dame shook it off, proclaiming loudly that it had all been a planned insult.

Vieri, furious, replied hotly ; upon which Donati drew his sword, vowing his wife was insulted. Blows followed, and the feast ended in a general fray.

“ The Vale so sends unto the Seven Hills,  
The Forest to the Altar.”

*(Act II. sc. i.)*

The Cerchi party was called the Forest party—“ Parte Selvagia ”—as they came from the woods of the valley of the Seine and district of Acone. Later they assumed the name of Bianchi, and Donati’s followers were then called Njeri. 3



"Shall I, then, feed on Dante's pile of bones?"

(*Act III. sc. ii.*)

While Dante was at the Court of Can Grande, a boy who was concealed under the table, gathering the bones which, according to the custom of the times, were thrown under the table, placed them all together at the feet of the poet. On rising from dinner the pile was discovered. The company seemed much amused, and Can Grande remarked that Dante must be a great eater of meat, to which he quickly retorted, alluding to the name of Cane, "Sir, you would not see so many bones even if I were a dog (*un cane*)" (Botta's "Dante").

"When with rude hands his sister once he tore  
From cloister's sacred shelter."

(*Act III. sc. ii.*)

"Corso Donati took twelve ruffians and scaled the convent where his sister Piccada, or perhaps Riccarda, was a nun, and carried her off by force to his home, and gave her in marriage to a nobleman named Rosellino della Rosa" ("Par.," c. iii. v. 34).















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